

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Nepal – a small country lying on the lap of the Himalaya – is renowned for its physical and cultural diversity. From geographical point of view, it includes both the extreme lowlands of the Tarai and the extreme highlands of the Himalaya Mountain. Ethnically, it is a “cultural mosaic inhabited as it is by an amazingly diverse array of ethnic, caste, linguistic and religious communities” (Pradhan, 2002 : 1). Nepali ethnic and cultural diversity has created a dignity and identity that are unique in the world. According to 2001 census, there are 101 castes and ethnic groups, 92 language and dialect groups, and 12 religious groups. A demographer states that these people are basically derived from two racial ‘stocks’: Caucasoid from the southwest and Mongoloid from the northeast. “Caucasoid are Indo-Aryan speakers and mainly Hindu whether of Highland (Hill) or Lowland (Tarai) variant, while the Mongoloid are ethnic groups with their own mother tongue as Tibeto-Burman speakers, with Buddhist and shamanistic inclination” (Gurung, 2001 : 108). Furthermore, the people of Nepal could be classified into three major racial and cultural divisions: “Indo-Aryan, Mongoloid (Tibeto-Burman), and the Austro-Asiatic branch” (Poudyal, 1992 : 135). According to the Nepali social composition, the high castes, i.e. Brahmin and Chhetri, and low castes, i.e. Dalits from both Hill and the Tarai, are included in the Aryan category. Mongoloid includes ethnic groups such as the Magar, Gurung, Newar, Rai, Limbu, Tamang, Bhote, Sherpa, Tharu, Thakali, etc. The people belonging to some tiny indigenous groups such as the Chepang, Kusunda, Raute, Bankariya, Sattar, Danuwar, Meche, etc. are considered the Austro-Asiatic section. All Mongoloid and Austro-Asiatic tribal groups, a total of 59 groups, are defined as ethnic groups (*adibasi janajati* in Nepali terminology) and most of them are now associated with the Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationality (NEFIN)¹.

Nepali society is heterogeneous that can traditionally be classified both vertically and horizontally. According to Hindu Varna system, Nepali society in its vertical structure is divided into four caste hierarchies: Brahmin, Chhetri (Kshetriya), Baisyas and Sudras. In the early history of society, people were categorised in different strata by their occupations rather than by their birth or kinship. Over the time, such occupation based social stratification turned into a rigid caste structure reflecting the narrow interest of ruling elites. In general, the term Brahmin refers to priests and religious teachers; Chhetri for warriors and rulers; Baisya for production, farming and trade, and Sudra for service and artisan jobs.

¹ For the list of ethnic groups from different regions, see Appendix: 1-2.

Ethnic groups (*Janajatis*), because of their non-hierarchical or say egalitarian social composition, remained outside the Varna system. In the Varna system, each group has been given a status in social hierarchy along vertical line, while there are no such lines among the *janajatis*. Except some hierarchical division among Newars, there is a non-hierarchical horizontal relationship among the various *janajatis*. Thus, most of the activists from this stratum claimed to be separate from the Varna system with their specific identity and culture. According to Hinduism and the traditional system of the state, person's belongingness with distinct caste hierarchy determines his/her position that is reflected in unequal treatment in judicial administration, in role assigned to state affairs and in distribution of economic resources. The high hill caste, Brahmin and Thakuri-Chhetri, as representing first and second highest strata of population in the Hindu hierarchy, had monopolised the role in the state power through the religious and advisory role and as ruling elites respectively. Ethnic and indigenous groups were placed in the third ranking, Baishya, who were regarded as traders. Although a few of them are advanced and have some role in the state authority and affairs, most of them are excluded and disadvantaged in the decision making process and in distribution of power and resources within the state. Shudra or Dalits – a fourth group which are placed at the bottom of social ranking - are highly exploited, oppressed and suppressed in all spheres (social, cultural, and economic) of life by the ruling elites and so-called upper castes. Consequently, they have been extremely marginalised in the polity of the state.

Conventionally, the people are divided into four Varna (estates) and thirty-six Jat (castes). This system was later legalized. For the first time in the legal history of Nepal, a Civil Code was promulgated in 1854 which formally classified the Nepali society into three broader descending hierarchical groups, along vertical lines. Those were: 1) *Tagadhari* –the sacred-thread wearing castes at the top, who effectively dominated the state power, 2) *Matwali* – alcohol-drinking ethnic groups in the middle, as excluded from the polity of the state, and 3) *Sudra* who were divided into two sub-groups: impure-touchable and impure-untouchable (*Achhut*), as the extremely marginalised group at the very bottom. Though the New Civil Code-1963 replaced the Old Code recognizing the principles of equality of Nepali citizen irrespective of caste, the long held customary practices, instituted by the Old Code, deeply influenced the state and society of Nepal. The accommodation of *Matwali* or ethnic groups into the fold of the Hindu hierarchical caste system was in conformity to the then state's designed scheme of national integration through assimilation which was but exclusionary. The integration of Nepal was long dominated by elites' policy of protection and promotion of the monarchy, Hinduism and the Nepali language, which led to exclusion of large segment of society, such as ethnic and other groups, from the state's power and resources (Hachhethu, 2008).

From a different perspective, Nepal is a country of minorities where none of the caste and ethnic groups constitutes majority groups numerically. In fact, no single stratum of caste and ethnic group exceeds 16 percent of the total population. The 2001 census shows that the highest population of the country is 15.8 percent from Chhetri, followed by Brahmin with 12 percent and Dalits with 13 percent. In aggregate, the ethnic groups (*Janajatis*) are the largest group, with 8.4 million representing 37.19 percent of the total population of the country. Among the ethnic groups, Magar, Tharu, Tamang, Newar, Rai, Gurung and Limbu comprise as the largest groups in 34 districts, and the high caste hill groups, Brahmin and Chhetri, are in majority in the half of the total districts of Nepal. Officially, the number of ethnic groups of Nepal has increased from 26 out of total 60 caste/ethnic groups recorded in 1991 census to 43 out of 101 caste/ethnic groups registered in 2001 census. In between the time of these two censuses, the government once identified 61 groups as ethnic which was later confined to 59 groups. In any case, numbers of ethnic groups, 16 indigenous groups, are not listed in census (Ukyab and Adhikari, 2000; IIDS, 2002; Gellner and Karki, 2007; 2008). For the first time in Nepal's census history, 1991 census included 39 ethnic groups in the ethnic demography of Nepal. Likewise, the last census held in 2001, reported 43 *janajatis* whilst the NEFIN and NFDIN classified 59 such ethnic groups. Almost all these groups have their own ethnic identity in terms of language, culture, ancestry and territory. These identities are distinct and different to each other. However, out of the total ethnic groups (*Adibasi Janajatis*), the greatest numbers are concentrated in the Hill area (24) followed by the mountain area (18) and Tarai (17) respectively². If we look at the population structure of the ethnic (Adivasi/Janajati) groups, it seems obvious that out of the 75 districts, only seven ethnic groups (Magar, Tharu, Tamang, Newar, Rai, Gurung, and Limbu) have significantly occupied the first position in 34 districts followed by the second in 20 districts and the third in 19 districts respectively (CBS, 2002; IIDS, 2002).

This study is about the Magars, one of the 59 officially recognized ethnic groups of Nepal. The Magars constitute 7.1 per cent, third largest population of all 101 caste/ethnic groups of Nepal (Chhetri and Brahmin are the first two largest groups) and the first largest group among 59 ethnic groups. Though the Magars are spread all over the country; their presence in western and mid-western development regions is substantial (see Appendix 2). Among the total Magar population, more than 50 percent reside in western development region. The western and mid-western development region, especially, Lumbini, Gandaki, Dhaulagiri, Rapti and Bheri zones comprise the 'Magarant region', where 71 percent of the total Magar population of Nepal are living (Baral Magar, 2060: 8; CBS 2002). According to 2001 census, the most densely Magar populated districts are Palpa, Rolpa, Nawalparasi, Tanahun,

² Among them, Thakali and Newar, are regarded as the advanced ethnic groups, while ten including Kusunda, Kisan, Raute etc. are endangered, twelve including Thudam, Jhangad, Shiyar, etc. are highly marginalised, and thirty-five, including Magar, Dhimal, Dura, Tharu, Yolmo, Rai, Limbu, Gurung, etc. are marginalised and disadvantaged (NEFIN, 2004; Subba et al 2002; Appendix 1-1)

Baglung, Syanja and Myagdi. Except Rolpa, all districts are in the Western region and Magars living in this region identify themselves as Barha Magarant. Rolpa is the major Magar dominated district in Midwestern region and most of the Magar territory in the region is identified themselves as the Athar Magarant. Magars from both territories are broadly divided into northern and southern respectively because of differences between these two groups in terms of cultural diversity, patterns of pastorals and migration (Baral, 2063VS; Baral, 2008).

Along with other several ethnic groups, Magar has long been marginalised as a result of domination of traditional ruling elites from high caste hill group in politics and society of Nepal. A number of previous studies show that in comparison with high caste Hiill group and Newar, the ethnic and Dalits representation in government, bureaucracy and political parties is very low (Baral, 1991; 1992; 1998; Gurung, 2001; IIDS, 2000; IIDS, 2002; Neupane, 2002; Bhattachan, 2000; Maharjan, 2000; Karmar, 2000; 2002; Hachhethu, 2003; 2004; 2006; 2007; 2008; Yadav, 2005; Baral, 2063; and Baral, 2006). A report also suggests that except the Newars other ethnic groups' including Magar, representation in state mechanism is poor' (Thapa, 2006). Similarly, political participation of the Magar ethnic group in state affairs is found either very nominal or nil in proportion to their strength of the population³ (Baral, 2063VS; DMA, 2063VS; and MSU, 2063VS; 2064VS). Therefore, ethnic groups, including Magar, are disadvantaged and marginalised in the distribution of state power, resources and other affairs. Whilst, numerous members of ethnic groups have opted for the parliamentary path and local government as a means of participation through the election system, they have not had any significant influence in power, resources and decision-making. They have either very nominal or nil representation in the polity and most of their activists think that it is a result of exclusionary nature of the state and majoritarian (first-past-the post) election system. Therefore, proportional representation in state machinery in proportion to size of population of social segments has become the major agenda of ethnic activism in Nepal. Moreover, in the aftermath of April (2006) popular uprising, in which various ethnic organisations also played a vital role, ethnic activists have been pleading for the establishment of autonomous ethnic regions with an element of right to self determination. As the longstanding tradition of Nepali politics and society is exclusionary against the ethnic groups, the nature of Nepali state needs to change drastically for promoting inclusive or participatory democracy. Otherwise, if 'the state responds to ethnic mobilisation with exclusion and repression, ethno-political violence is bound to occur with bigger magnitude' (Poudyal, 2005: 15).

Democracy becomes substantive and stable if different groups of people are allowed to participate in the entire polity of the nation. Participation in democracy means sharing the

³ See also Chapter Three.

decision making with the citizens in general. It also refers to the political empowerment of various groups of people from different strata of society irrespective of caste, ethnicity, religion, region, sex and class. It is said that political conflict and violence are more likely to occur in open politics (liberal democracy) where the marginalized and disadvantaged groups have space to articulate their grievances and frustrations but do not have any political power to affect the necessary changes. In multiethnic societies the liberal democracy is unsuitable for inclusive participation in the polity. Therefore, in multicultural society like Nepal, democracy could become of great significance and stable only when it functions as an inclusive democracy in a way prescribed by consociationalism (i. e. distribution of power among different social groups).

Magars in Palpa, Kaski and Myagdi Districts (The Study Areas)

The districts, like Palpa, Kaski and Myagdi are situated south to north in the western hills and are known for its socio-political history and natural beauty. Palpa is the centre of the Barha Magarant where Magars have been indigenously dominating through their settlements since its history. There were several political entities at village level once ruled by Magars themselves before migration of Sen and Shah, who are supposed to have hereditary link with the Sisaudiya clan of the Rajputs of Chitaur of northern India, around half of the fifteenth century. It is also said that some Rajputs had migrated in the upper hills along with crossing the Chure range (the lower hills). “They formed separate states and their descendants were Shahs and Sen who ruled in Gorkha and Palpa respectively” (Kasajoo, 2001 : 9). In and around the migration of the Rajput rulers, there were two main Magar principalities, Bakumgadhi and Baldengadhi in the east and west of Palpa respectively (Pradhan, 1991). Along with political history, Palpa and its capital Tansen are also famous for scenery hills, lakes and river.

Likewise, Myagdi is also a tourist destination area and it is a part of internationally famous, Annapurna Trek. Historically, it was a part of strong Parbat Mall state in the Baise era (Baniya, 2005). The famous Kali River and Myagdi River symbolised the early civilisation of Myagdi. Though Magar ethnicity has the major population, most of the time in its political history the Thakali, a minority group in the district, has been dominating through the local governance. Likewise, Kaski and its headquarter- Pokhara is well-known tourist destination as well as the major centre of the western hills. Pokhara is an eminent place where the people throughout the country, particularly from western hills have migrated for settlements. The population started to increase rapidly after the eradication of malaria in the mid 60s and with the construction of the Prithvi highway to Kathmandu and the Siddhartha highway to the Indian border. Pokhara was declared the centre of the western region in 1973. Development in transport, health, education, business, and tourism attracted successive waves of migration from the surrounding hills. The annual population

growth rate of Pokhara has been 7.5 percent. Subsequent migration, by all ethnic groups has swelled the population of the town. As a rapidly growing urban hub, Pokhara provides a distinct example of heterogeneous society with a variety of ethnic groups from the hill region of Nepal. Documents concerning the history of the Kaski, Palpa and Myagdi (Parbat) are rare. Although Palpa, Myagdi and Kaski districts are highly heterogeneous, Magars have significantly settled over here. The following table deals the population composition in these districts.

Table 1.1

Ethnic / Caste Composition in Palpa, Kaski and Myagdi Districts

District/Caste-Ethnicity	Palpa	Myagdi	Kaski
Brahmin	51703 (19.3%)	8945 (7.8%)	114899 (30.2%)
Chhetri	25295 (9.4%)	21135 (18.4%)	60703 (16.0%)
Magar	136750 (50.9%)	47820 (41.8%)	23522 (6.2%)
Newar	9706 (3.6%)	1556 (1.3%)	20117 (5.3%)
Gurung	422 (0.1%)	1144 (1.0%)	69038 (18.1%)
Thakali	154 (0.05%)	1397 (1.2%)	1997 (0.5%)
Kumal	6013 (2.2%)	10 (0.0%)	1764 (0.4%)
Chhantel	-	4462 (3.9%)	136 (0.03%)

Other*	38515 (14.3%)	27978 (24.4%)	88351 (23.2%)
Total	268558 (100.0%)	114447 (100.0%)	380527 (100.0%)

Source: Population Census 2001 (Caste/Ethnicity, Mother Tongue and Religion)

Note*: Dalits population is the major component in other section

As per the table 1-1, Magar ethnicity has the majority in Palpa and it is the largest group in Myagdi. As a dominant population, particularly in the eastern Palpa, they had their own ruling system till modern Nepal; therefore, they are successful in continuing their language and culture in this part. Although they have abandoned their own principalities because of the migrated rulers, their own ruling system at the village level still exists. But, in Myagdi they had been subjected by the Malla rulers around twelve century. Therefore, they lost their language and their culture was eroded. However, the shamanism and animism practices and their simple lifestyle and their way of ritual denote their earlier and aboriginal culture. In Kaski, Magar is the second largest ethnic group and they have migrated in different time from different places. In relation the Palpa and Myagdi districts, Magars is in minority in this district due to large population who are from the Brahmin, Chhetri and Gurung ethnicity. In western Hills, the activism came into existence first in Kaski with the interests of uniting and cooperating among the Magars based on their ethnic identity. For seeking these interests, Magar organisation was established in early 1980s, while, such organisations were established in Myagdi and Palpa only after restoration of democracy in 1990.

The above table shows that among various caste and ethnic groups in Palpa, Magars are in the majority (51%) followed by the Brahmin, Dalits and Chhetri. Newar and Kumal seem to be the second and third largest ethnic group respectively though their population are very less with respect to the Magars. Likewise, in Myagdi, Magars have dominant population (42%) followed by the Chhetri, Dalits and Brahmin. In addition to the Magars, Chhantel, Newar, Thakali and Gurung seem to be other major ethnic groups respectively. So far in Kaski, Brahmins are the largest, followed by Gurungs, Chhetris, Dalits, Magars, and Newars. The largest ethnic group in Kaski is Gurung and Magar is the second most numerous. Among the total Magar population in Palpa and Myagdi more than 95 percent are settled in villages. Most of Newars and Thakali are settled in urban cities of these districts in order to promote their business. In Kaski, around fifty per cent of the Gurungs and Magars, originally rural populations, live in the hills. As the original settler and because of homogenous composition of their population, Magars in Palpa use more their native tongue in comparison to Myagdi and Kaski. Likewise, they are more influenced by the Hindu religion rather than others in these three districts. However, since the establishment of their ethnic organisations, Magars have been trying to use their mother tongue and adopt Buddhism through the reviving

activism in the areas of language and religion. The composition of the religion and Magar tongue in Palpa, Myagdi and Kaski are given in following table.

Table No. 1.2
Composition of the Religion and Magar Tongue in
Palpa, Kaski and Mygdi Districts

Religion				District	Magar Tongue		
Hindu	Buddha	Other	Total Population		Magar Speaker	Non-Speaker	Total Population
236370 (88.0%)	30665 (11.4%)	1523 (0.6%)	268558 (100.0%)	Palpa	91147 (66.7%)	45603 (33.3%)	136750 (100.0%)
85692 (74.9%)	28125 (24.6%)	630 (0.5%)	114447 (100.0%)	Myagdi	16997 (35.5%)	30823 (64.5%)	47820 (100.0%)
310946 (81.7%)	60435 (15.9%)	9146 (2.4%)	380527 (100.0%)	Kaski	6331 (26.9%)	17191 (73.1%)	23522 (100.0%)

Source: Population Census 2001 (Caste/Ethnicity, Mother Tongue and Religion).

(Note: *in Magar tongue the percent show out of the total Magar population in given district)

* Note: The percentage in the religion row show the proportion of the total religious population, and the percentage in the language row show the percentage of the group that can speak 'their' language; the increase in those speaking the language may be due to increased awareness of the consequences of reporting a positive response.

According to the table no. 1.2, around 67 percent of the Magars in Palpa use their mother tongue and 35.5 percent Magars in Myagdi stated that they know their language. Most Gurung and Newar speak their mother tongue in Kaski (CBS, 2003; Baral, 2006), but only around twenty-seven percent of Magars speak their own language. Likewise, the table states that the majority of people in Kaski (75%), Palpa (88%) and Myagdi (82%) are Hindu. Regarding Hindu, the percentage of Buddhism and other religions are very nominal in these districts. In comparison with Palpa and Kaski, Buddhism seems significant in terms of number in Myagdi. It seems that Magars are influenced by the Hindu religion. However, the census data show that the number of Hindus is decreasing; Buddhists and others (Christians, Muslims, Jains, and Sikhs) are increasing just as they are at the national level (Baral, 2008). This is partly due to conversion (especially to Christianity) and partly due to the fact that many who were previously registered as Hindu now as Buddhist

There are no historical records to inform us when and from where Magars first came to settle around Palpa, Kaski and Myagdi. The settlements patterns, pastoral way of life, caste/ethnic population distribution and retention of traditional culture suggest that they are the original settlers in the Palpa and Myagdi districts. Hence, the different literatures

also deal that the Magars were the indigenous or the first settlers in these districts (Baral Magar, 2050VS; Hamilton, 1971; Subedi, 2054VS; Baniya, 2005; Kawakita, 1982). The name of the several places and rivers in these districts is derived from the Magar tongue. Likewise, there have been many Magar communities in the hill villages of Kaski for a long time. It is supposed that the Khas and the Magars are the earlier settler in this district and the Gurung and other ethnic groups came late to inhabit here. Some Magars have been settled here since the foundation of the kingdom of Kaski under Kulmandan Shah. Rana Magars have a long tradition of worshipping the Kali Devi (goddess) in the palace (Kaski Kot) of the king of the Kaski state. Other Magar priests worship the goddesses Alamdevi of Syangja and Gorakhkali of Gorkha (Baral 2062VS, 2008; Lecomte, 2004). The names of many places and streams, such as Darbarthok, Magarthok, Multhok, Nuwarthok, Bulaudhi, Chhahdi, Fewa and Modi are in Magar language, suggesting that the region might have been under the Magar rule in the past.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Although Nepal does not have a long history of ethnic movement, some events of ethnic rebellions were noticed in eastern and central Nepal during the Rana regime (1846-1950). Ethnic activism that appeared only after the restoration of democracy in 1990 was almost non-existent in the past due to lack of democracy for a considerable length of time. Advent of democracy in 1951 was short lived as it was replaced by an authoritarian partyless Panchayat system by a royal coup in December 1960. The Panchayat regime, like Rana oligarchy, was dominated by traditional ruling elites of high cast hill group. As the system itself was temperamentally anti-democratic, it negated the value of equality and liberty which narrowed the space for people's participation. Ethnic movements, like political movements, were not tolerated but suppressed whenever some sign of ethnic activism appeared. Consequently, inclusive democracy did not exist in Nepali politics in the past under undemocratic regimes. The end of Panchayat system in 1990, however, brought a change. The ethnic groups, along with other excluded voices sprang up due to the open environment, freedom and debates of 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 their voices along with demand for revising traditional structure of state. With reference to political power structure of the country even in the changed political context of 1990, no any substantial changes were conducted for empowering the marginalised and excluded sections of society. The leadership pattern remained the same as it was before 1990. The traditional ruling elites from hill Hindu high caste people dominated the leadership of the state apparatus and the representation from the marginalized sections of society was minimal. The three parliaments formed after the restoration of multiparty

system under the 1990 constitution had the same pattern of elite composition as was the case with the dismantled Rashtriya Panchyat (Baral, 2007; Baral, Hachhethu and Sharma, 2001).

Nepal's political experience of 1990s exposed the limitation of procedural and ritualistic democracy. Democracy in its operation and function drags the nature and characteristics of state and society. It becomes popular and stable if different groups of people are allowed to participate in the entire polity of the nation. Participation in democracy means sharing the decision making with the citizens in general. It also refers to the empowerment of various groups of people from different strata of society, irrespective of caste, ethnicity, religion, region, sex and class (Nie and Verba, 1975; Esman, 1994). Dahl defines democracy as a "process of participation and contestation which approximates rather than fully satisfies democratic ideals" (1971 : 1-7). In multicultural society, there is a risk that 'open competitive politics facilitate the politicisation of ethnic communities and the consequent danger of ethnic extremism and violent destabilisation of the political order' (Esman, 1994 : 41). However, in multiethnic societies the traditional liberal democracy is unsuitable for inclusive participation in the polity. Therefore, in a multicultural society like Nepal, democracy could become popular and stable only when it functions as an inclusive democracy in a way prescribed by consociationalism (i.e. distribution of power among different social groups). Inclusive democracy has been defined based on two criteria: socio-cultural groups have to be included in the decision making processes that affect them; and inclusive policies have to be targeted towards the excluded and disadvantaged groups is necessary (Lawoti, 2005).

In retrospect democracy in 1990s could not change the traditional exclusionary structures of the state which continued to affect the lives of the ethnic, Dalits, Madhesi, women and the poor. These groups of people continue to suffer and are deprived from political, social and economic power and opportunities, due to the domination of a few elite from the high caste group as well as the exclusionary structure of the state (Hoftun et.al., 1999; Neupane, 2000; Gurung, 2004; Khanal, 2004; Baral, 2004; Lawoti, 2005; Baral, 2006; Hachhethu, 2006; 2007). Nevertheless, the open atmosphere after 1990 encouraged numerous ethnic organisations to surface and promote their ethnic identity and to fight for inclusion in society and polity. By the provisions of the basic human rights that allowed the activities of ethnic organisations and recognised the ethnic groups as part of a multiethnic and multicultural state, the 1990 constitution allowed to air ethnic demands. Political conflict and violence are more likely to occur in open politics where the marginalised and excluded groups have space to articulate their grievances and frustrations but do not have any political power to affect the necessary changes (Lawoti, 2005). With the advent of democracy in 1990, the level of political knowledge among the people gradually increased. Therefore, they were able to articulate their grievances and dissatisfaction against the exclusionary policies of state and the

dominant groups. Hence, the ethnic activism accelerated through their organisations for seeking participation with ethnic identity.

For a decade since the mid 1990s, Nepal faced the violence conflict due to the Maoist war. This conflict gradually extended among the marginal and excluded people particularly among the ethnic people and Dalits. As a result, the ethnic issues were intertwined with Maoist insurgency. Hence, the ethnic movement, including the slogan of ethnic autonomy, has widely been enlightened as the major issue of politics. Meanwhile, ethnic issues became prominent currency as marginalised, oppressed, suppressed and unprivileged strata of society tended to acquire a major political unit within Nepalese politics. Hence, ethnicity has been an unavoidable political phenomenon in Nepal. This was fueled by the ethnic population, particularly Magar and Kirant, as well as Tharu and Madhesi, who were involved in the Maoist Peoples' War. So the ethnic agenda has been introduced into political discourses of state, political parties or civil society.

Nepali politics entered into new dimension since the first quarter of 2006. Once again people along with political parties, including the Maoists, came together and marched for 19 days in April against the despotic rule of monarchy and restored democracy. Hence, the debate about inclusive democracy through proportional representation has begun. The goal is to ensure representation of various social groups in proportion to their size of population and facilitate reservation of some seats for marginalised groups. Almost all ethnic organisations sought reformative and informative processes to achieve recognition of their identity of right to represent their people in the state apparatus. The April 2006 revolution is a milestone not simply because it transformed Nepal from a monarchical state to a republican state; it also pushed Nepal towards the principle of inclusive democracy. The idea of inclusive democracy is established by movements launched by Dalit, women, janajati and Madhesi. Such activism has now turned into political power, nurtured by increasing social acceptance to some major demands of ethnic groups, i.e. sharing of power in proportion to the size of population, federalism on the basis of ethnicity, reservation for marginalized groups and right to self determination. But two key questions are yet to be explored: are the common ethnic people aware of the rising issues of ethnic demands, and to what extent the ethnic activists are mobilizing the ordinary ethnic people for their own collective and community rights? These questions can be considered 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 do they involve and participate in both ethnic and non-ethnic politics? Does democracy deliver service to the Magars living in poverty? How do they perceive democracy, political parties, state restructuring and ethnicity? These are some of the research questions related to Magar

ethnic politics at the local level and the researcher has tried to explore and analyse these issues through this study.

The rise of Magar ethnicity is a part of the present wave of ethnic movements in Nepal. As the first effort of raising their movement, some educated Magar activists initiated a gathering in Gulmi in 2012 B.S. (1955). Likewise, there was a Magar conference held on Falgun 26-27, 2014 B.S. (1958) in Damauli, the District headquarter of Tanahun. Similarly, the Magar activists from various background and profession formed the 'Langhali Pariwar' in 2036 (1980). This was the foremost step to organize the Magar community at the central level thorough established "Langhali Pariwar Central Ad hoc Committee' in Kathmandu. It was renamed Langhali Pariwar Sangh by the decision of the gathering held in Butwal in 2038 B.S (1981). This Sangh initiated the first general conference in Damauli in 2039 B.S. (1982). The reinstated democracy in 1990 favoured many activities of the non-governmental and interest groups. This created tremendous influences over the ethnic activism including Magar association to seek their identity. The agenda of the movement at that time was centered on their language, religion and culture. The Langhali Pariwar Sangh was converted into the Nepal Magar Sangh (NMA) through its fourth general conference held in 2048 (1991). As the sister wings of NMA, Nepal Magar Student Association and Nepal Magar Women Association were established in 2051 (1994) and 2055 (1998) respectively. Moreover, the Maoists War in which lots of Magar people were involved seemed to focus more on their activism of political agenda with their ethnic identity. Two years after the Maoists war began (in 1996) Magar National Liberation Front Nepal (MNLF) was established as one of its strong ethnic wings. Due to the influence of MNLF and their active participation in Maoist army, Magars had significantly contributed to the cause of the war. By their effective contribution in the Maoist war, Magars became well known ethnic identity throughout the nation. Due to the pressure of ethnic and Magar interest groups, the state and non-state entities began to think about the ethnic issues. Since the April 2006 revolution, ethnic movement has been more effective in obtaining proportional participation and inclusion in the polity of the state. For organizing Magars with political ideology, different political parties established their ethnic wings. The UML's Nepal Democratic Magar Sangh and NC's Nepal National Magar Association were established in the 2063 (2006) and 2065 (2008) respectively. Likewise, Magar Hangh Council affiliated with National Ethnic Liberation Party, Nepal Magar Autonomous Association close to NCP-United and Magar Liberation Association as the Magar ethnic part of People Front, were established in order to promote their ideology among the Magars. Besides the political wings, there are many other ethnic Magar organizations like, Nepal Magar Association, Nepal Magar Student Association, Nepal Magar Women Association, Nepal Magar Cultural Association, Nepal Magar Youth Association, Society for Magar Mass media professionals, and other around two dozens Magar associations have been carrying out Magar activism. The establishment of such

organisations and their initiation on political, social, cultural movements has significantly contributed to the cause of identity for Magar and other indigenous ethnicity.

As for the nature and character of the Magar movement is concerned, it appeared that they were first organised on the ethnic grounds for their identity and solidarity. Magars are the major ethnic group and are scattered throughout the nation. Some educated young activists and professionals from the west Hills (eastern Magars) took initiative to form the association in order to unite the Magars. They began their campaign on Magar movement after the establishment of democracy in 1951 and accomplished their activities systematically with the founding of the 'Nepal Langhali Pariwar Sang' as the central level Magar association in 1982. The activists initiated many gatherings, particularly in Magar dominated districts in western hills. In those days, the Magar movement was more focused on uniting and organising the Magars in promoting their identity. Due to authoritarian nature of partyless Panchyat political system, it was very difficult to promote the idea of ethnic politics. Ethnic movements began to emerge only after the restoration of democracy in 1990. Likewise, with the establishment of the Nepal Langhali Pariwar in 1981, Magar activism extended to some urban centers. Magar activists were more active for their activism in language, religion and culture only in the post-1990 democracy period and renamed their organisation as the Nepal Magar Association (NMA). Since then some political agendas like secularism, proportional representation and ethnic rights were included in their political, cultural and social movement. The activists particularly from the educated and professional activists coupled with the activists from ex-army background, who dominate the NMA, have been playing a significant role in the Magar movement.

Magars are known as the brave warriors in Nepal and throughout the world due to the role they exhibited in the unification of Nepal and by their recruitment in British army and by involvement in the first and second world wars. But, they are unprivileged and excluded ethnic group and so the CPN-Maoist successfully cashed their disadvantage position for its armed insurgency during 1996-2005. During that time, Maoist established different ethnic wings, like the Magar National Liberation Front (MNLF) for Magars. Magars had significantly contributed in the extension and widening of the Maoist war throughout the nation with their recruitment in Maoist guerrillas. The MNLF was the first political Magar organisation through which they began to unite through political ideology and put forth their political demand. The main demand of this movement is to seek Magarant autonomous region with right to self determination. However, two results appeared through the ethnicised politics and politicised ethnicity. First, ethnic organisation like NMA and NEFIN put forth the agenda of identity politics in their movement. Secondly, different political parties set up their ethnic wings, including Magar sister organisations, in order to organise the Magars through their political ideology. As a result, ethnic movement became politically strong and succeeded in

fulfilling its demand for proportional representation in the polity and inclusive democracy within the state. Therefore, many ethnic activists, including Magars, are present in significant numbers in Constituent Assembly which was formed about two years back. They are working together for a common agenda, i.e. ethnic federalism with the right to self determination. In a nutshell, it can be said that almost all political parties have given a great value to the empowerment of ethnic groups, including Magars.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study is to explore the Magar in politics from different angles, particularly analysing the nature and state of participation at central as well as local political institutions, collecting the views of the Magars on current pressing issues of Nepalese politics, and investigating the activism of the Magar organisations for socialising and empowering the Magar people. This study also intends to find out the perception of the Magar communities living in Western Region on democracy, political party and ethnic federalism, and finding suggestions for their inclusion in mainstream politics. The specific objectives of this study are the following:

- a) To explore the participation of the Magar people and their attitudes towards government and state affairs
- b) To assess the role of Magar activism in mobilization of the Magar population and in designing plan and strategy for ethnic rights of Magar community
- c) To analyse perception and role of the Magar people on contemporary politics, i.e. democracy, party politics and federalism
- d) To investigate strategy of political parties to empower the people of ethnic communities like Magars; and
- e) To assess their opinions in designing the state restructuring and establishing a Magarant autonomous province as a distinct political unit of federal Nepal.

1.4 Research Methodology

This is an empirical study largely based on primary sources of information. Primary data was collected through using various research tools, i.e. questionnaire survey, in-depth interviews, focus group discussion (FGD) and participatory observation. It applied both probability sampling method (systematic random sampling) and non-probability sampling (purposive and snow balling samplings) methods for the collection of primary data. Besides, the study also obtained secondary data through literature review, study of governmental

and non-governmental documents, i.e. election manifesto of political parties and analysis of media reporting. A brief account of different research tools and techniques adopted in this study is presented below.

1.4.1 Research Design

This study is designed by formulating several questions related to targeted group – Magars belonging to and settling in *Barha Magarat*. The key research questions are: who are Magars and how their identity as a distinct ethnic group is constructed? Why Magars – despite them being the third largest population among the 101 caste/ethnic group of the country and being the largest among the listed 59 ethnic groups – have been traditionally marginalised in power structure of the country? How ordinary Magars and their activists perceive their role – both in past and present – in politics? Do they have a good strategy to promote their ethnic interest – i.e. recognition of identity, access to natural resources of the country, and representation in political power structure of the country? How do they understand and react to some inclusive concepts – i.e. proportional representation, inclusive democracy, party politics, ethnic autonomy and federalism – in Nepali context? As research is designed to make the study empirical and explore as well as descriptive and analytical, the field work was carried out in sampled areas.

1.4.2 Sampling

The study aimed to capture ethnic politics of Magar in hill areas of Western Development Region, a region traditionally known as *Bara Magarat* where Magars have historically and currently settled as one of the dominant groups. Though Magars spread all over the country, there are some hill districts in Western Development Regions, like Palpa, Nawalparasi, Tanahun, Baglung, Syanja, Myagdi and Parbat where Magar population live densely. Magar is the single identity vis-à-vis other ethnic groups like Gurung, Rai, Limbu and Tamang; but there are some internal variation among the Magars in terms of language, culture and religion. Based on cultural divergence among the Magars, their settlement areas can be largely regrouped into three clusters:

- i. Magars living in Palpa, Nawalparasi, Syanja and Tanahun share common culture, religion, and language.
- ii. Magars living in Myagdi, Parbat and Baglung are different from Magars living in the first cluster.
- iii. Magars living in Kaski are different from Magars living in the first and second clusters since Kaskeli Magars are migrants.

With an aim to capture all these three variations among the Magars, three districts were sampled, one from each cluster, using purposive or judgmental sampling method, the sample districts are Palpa from cluster 1, Myagdi from cluster 2 and Kaski from cluster 3. Palpa is a major southern Magar district while Myagdi is a major northern Magar district. These two settlements of Magar represent the different distinct cultures and Clans. Kaski is the central district of the Western Development Region and the major migratory district of the country where many ethnic groups including Magars have come to settle as late migrants. Palpa is a dense Magar district among the 75 districts of Nepal, where Magar constitutes 51 per cent of the total population of the district. In Myagdi, Magar is the largest group with its strength of 42 per cent population of the district. In Kaski district, Magar is the fifth largest group with its strength of 6.2 per cent in the total population of the district (CBS, 2002).

At the second phase of sampling, nine sample sites – 3 from each of the three sample districts – was selected in order to balance rural and urban characteristics of the targeted group – Magars. Besides, these nine sample sites were selected taking into consideration of internal variation among Magars on several accounts, i.e. culture, clan, ethnic language speaker and non-speaker, majority and minority in population of selected areas, geographical location (near and far from district headquarter) and political factor (dominated or subordinated in local politics of selected areas). Of these nine sampled sites, three are urban areas – again one from each sampled district – and six are rural areas – two from each sampled districts. Distribution of these nine sample areas are as followings:

- i. Pipaldanda and Somadi VDCs (rural) and Tansen (urban) from Palpa.
- ii. Histan and Baranja VDCs (rural) and Beni Bazar (urban) from Myagdi
- iii. Nirmal Pokhari and Lumle VDCs (rural) and Pokhara (urban) from Kaski.

At the third phase of sampling of the Magar respondents for questionnaire survey, target numbers of respondent – 300 commoners (100 from each sample district) – were selected through the systematic random sampling. The latest voter lists of nine different sample areas were provided by the offices of election commission in Myagdi, Kaski and Palpa. By using these lists the researcher himself made separate voter lists of Magars to select the Magar respondents. In addition to this, 75 Magar activists (25 from each sample district) were also selected for questionnaire survey by using purposive and snowball sampling methods. For selection of ethnic activist for questionnaire survey, different variables, such as rural and urban, male and female, rich and poor as well as level of education, age, clan and political backgrounds were taken into account. Table below shows about sampling of questionnaire survey.

Table No. 1.3

Distribution of Sample Respondents

District	Rural			Urban			Total		
	<i>Voters Activists Total</i>			<i>Voters Activists Total</i>			<i>Voters Activists Total</i>		
Kaski	45	7	52	55	18	73	100	25	125
<i>Nirmal Pokhari VDC</i>	22	3	25						
<i>Lumle VDC</i>	23	4	27						
<i>PokharaSub-metropolis</i>				55	18	73			
Palpa	95	10	105	05	15	20	100	25	125
<i>Pipaldanda VDC</i>	74	6	80						
<i>Somadi VDC</i>	21	4	25						
<i>Tansen Municipality</i>				5	15	20			
Myagdi	95	14	109	05	11	16	100	25	125
<i>Histan VDC</i>	53	9	62						
<i>Baranja VDC</i>	42	5	47						
<i>Beni Bazaar</i>				05	11	16			
Total	235	31	266	65	44	109	300	75	375

1.4.2.1 Questionnaire Survey: The questionnaire survey was administrated with 300 voters and 75 activists from May to November, 2006. The structured questionnaire consisted mainly of close ended questions and some open questions as well (see appendix 9 for the text of questionnaire). The researcher himself filled up the questionnaire by making direct contact with the respondents. This method allowed the researcher to obtain very useful insights into the views and attitudes of grass root/local people on activism, culture, politics and political participation of Magars.

1.4.2.2 Personal Interview: An unstructured interview method was also used to collect qualitative data from selected Magar activists. Around fifty in-depth interviews were conducted with 30 key Magar informants or activists. The level of selected activists is different from those involved in ethnic politics at local level to national level. Almost all these unstructured interviews had been conducted by the researcher in 2005 and 2006. By using this method, the researcher has been able to collect views of Magar activist on several significant issues, i.e. ethnic rights,

democracy, history of ethnic movement, interface between ethnicity and political party, ethnic contents of Maoists' 'people's war', ethnic autonomy, ethnic organisation, activism, and movements.

1.4.2.3 Focus Group Discussion: The focus group discussions were conducted during the field study at grass root level in the course of field work in Palpa, Kaski and Myagdi. The informal group discussion in the form of dialogue with activists and general people were organised in sample sites, like Histan, Baranja, Somadi, Tansen and Pokhara. The numbers of participant in each FGD were small, five to ten persons.

1.4.2.4 Participant Observation: Since researcher himself was involved directly in the field work, he was in an advantageous position to collect information through participatory observation. The researcher stayed with Magar family and observed the role of Magar people inside and outside the family. Besides, the researcher took advantage of his receptivity in formal and informal meeting of the Magar organisation at the local level in addition to his direct participation in different cultural, economic, social and religious programmes organised by the Magar community at sample sites. He observed formal meetings organised at the national and district levels by NMA and MNLF. He also observed some religious and rituals performances, some cultural practices, as well as life style and traditions of Magars at the grassroots level in sample areas.

1.4.2.5 Workshop: A regional level seminar was organised in Pokhara on March 9, 2007 for discussing the outputs of survey research. The participants were among the Magar activists from Palpa, Kaski, and Myagdi districts and the number of participants was thirty. The main purpose of the seminar was to get feedback on research findings on several issues, i.e. Magar cultural, linguistic and religious practices as well as Magars' attitudes towards politics and their ethnic activism.

1.4.2.6 Data Analysis: On the whole, the study collected a rich quantitative data and qualitative information. Data that were collected through survey and interview was coded, tabulated and analysed by using the computer software programme called Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). For better and precise understanding, all data are placed properly through tabulations. Qualitative data were systematised by using the technique of Content analysis. While using this method, descriptive and contextual analysis are used for interpretation and analysis of data and information through transcribing the field note and other related documents. The summary of research tools and techniques used for this study is presented below in tabular form.

Table No. 1.4**Research Tools and Techniques**

Specific Objective	Required Information	Source	Used Methods/Tools
To analyse the perceptions of the Magar people towards contemporary politics	Attitudes/opinions, interfaces and involvement of the Magars in democracy, political party, Maoist Peoples' War and federalism.	Voters, activists and key informants.	Individual questionnaire survey of Magar voters, face to face interview with activists, indepth interview with key informants.
To explore and analyse the participation and views of the Magar voters regarding governments and state affairs in the post democracy period (1990).	Magars position in various state mechanism and political parties, views of the Magars as how and why their role in politics and state affairs is.	Government documents, records and the Magar respondents.	Secondary source and the survey and interview with the Magars
To assess their opinions on how they could be more involved in the mainstream democratic process and the stare restructuring.	What the Magars actually perceive to increase their role in politics and state affairs, what they think about the process of state restructuring and Magar federalism.	Local events and incidents, Key Informants, voters and activists	Interviews, Survey, Discourse and dialogue with Magars and their activists, observation and focus group discussion.
To investigate the conceptual framework of political parties to empower the people of ethnic communities like Magar	The policies and programmes of the political parties in favour of ethnicity, composition of parties in terms of inclusion.	Manifestos of the political parties and their existence composition	Content analysis of the parties' manifesto for CA election and their official records
To assess the role of Magar activism and Magar organisation in regarding to the socio-cultural and Political movement.	The socio-cultural and political revival movement for fostering and revitalizing their ethnic identity and more political role.	Magar organisation and activists	Interview, observation and survey of the voters.

1.5 Limitations of the Study

The limitations of this study are following:

-) To study of the ethnic composition in different organs and institutions of the state.
-) To analyse the ethnic composition in the political parties from central level to district level (Palpa, Kaski and Myagdi)
-) To explore the data and facts in regarding the role as well as views, attitudes and perceptions of Magars of Palpa, Kaski and Myagdi districts on democracy, party politics, and federalism.
-) To analyse strengths and weaknesses of Magar organisations and their activism for promoting Magars ethnic identity and empowering them in the polity.

1.6 Significance of the Study

The significance of this study can be justified on following grounds:

-) Exploring Magar ethnicity, activism and political participation.
-) Understanding Magars' attitudes towards party politics, democracy and federalism.
-) Analysing strength and weakness of Magar organisation and activists for the promotion of Magar ethnic identity.
-) Examining that accommodation of ethnicity helps for the consolidation of democracy and nation building.
-) Finding out measures of inclusive democracy from ethnic (Magar) point of view that would be helpful to policy makers, political parties, ethnic activists and organisations, and others who want to learn more about the Magar ethnicity.

1.7 Organisation of the Study

The study is organised into ten chapters. The first chapter deals with introduction to the research study along with details about research methodology. The second chapter is about the literature review and conceptual framework. Constructing ethnic identity of the Magars as an ethnic group is mentioned in the third chapter. The Magar as a disadvantaged group in the mainstream politics and their role in the state mechanism is dealt with interface between Magar ethnicity and Nepali state from assimilation to differentiations in the fourth chapter. Chapter five examines the Magar activism particularly through their organisations in Kaski, Palpa and Myagdi districts. Chapter six defines democracy from the Magar perspective and the Magar in political parties is discussed in chapter seven. Chapter eight focuses on interface between the Maoists and the Magar in the context of Maoist conflict.

So far chapter nine, it deals with the Magars' perceptions on state restructuring and federalism. Finally, chapter ten is conclusion and summary of the findings of the study.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

There are vast literature on ethnicity, both on its theory and country specific illustration. To make them relevant to dominant discourses of ethnicity in Nepal, selective literatures are reviewed in three sections: (a) understanding of ethnicity – what is ethnicity and what is not ethnicity? (b) approaches to the study of ethnicity – what are the reasons behind the rise of ethnicity? and (c) relation between ethnicity and democracy – does ethnicity complement or contradict democracy? Literature review is done at three levels: (1) theoretical, (2) Nepali ethnicity in general, and (3) Magar ethnicity in particular.

2.1 Understanding Ethnicity

The notion of ethnicity is also expressed by words like race, tribe, nations, and nationality. Each of these words has distinct meaning but they are also generally used synonymously with ethnicity. Particular word is coined in different countries with contextual meaning. For instance, in the USA and European countries, ethnicity generally refers to late migrants who share common history or religion or race or language. In India and African countries, the term tribe is used to refer aboriginal people. In essence all these words carry the very definition of ethnicity that ethnic group has the characteristic of being a distinct category. Unanimity of such definition of ethnicity and associated words like tribe is evident in the text of several scholarly works.

- i. Tribe refers to “a group of people speaking a common language, observing uniform rules of social organization, working together for common purposes which have a common name, a contiguous territory, a relatively uniform culture or way of life and a tradition of common descent” (Verma, 1996: 3).

- ii. The meaning of ethnic group is not a mere aggregate of people of a sector of a population, but a self-conscious collection of people united or closely related by shared experiences (Parson, 2001; Jenkins, 1997; Cashmore, 2004)).
- iii. Ethnicity has something to do with the classification of people and group relationships between groups which consider themselves, and are regarded by others, as being culturally distinctive (Ronald Cohen, 1978).
- iv. Cohen defines ethnic group is one whose members are distinct from the members of other groups within the same society in that they share compulsory institutes like kinship and religion, and can communicate amongst themselves relatively easily (Quoted in Anderson, 1976: 10)
- v. An “ethnic group has its own identity, and this identity underlies the face that group is perceived as distinct groups from other group, and, at the same time, the group perceives itself as a distinct groups from other groups” (Mehta, 1999: 33).
- vi. An ‘ethnic group’ can be defined as a collectivity within a larger society which has real or putative common ancestry, memories and a common cultural focus such as language, religion, kinship or physical appearance (Bulmer, 1986).
- vii. Ethnicity is defined as a shared origin and culture based on common subjective identity and objective situation including some mixture of race, ancestry, language, religion, or shared historical memories (Ragin and Hein, 1993: 255).

Despite unanimity in understanding ethnicity or tribe as a distinct group different from other social groups, the definition of ethnicity is contested, particularly on its boundary. Does it imply any social group irrespective of their size (majority or minority) and strength (dominant or deprived)? Is it closely associated with groups like indigenous, minority, marginalised etc? There are two schools of thought which suggest two different paths on this definitional problem of ethnicity.

One believes that ethnic groups may be both majority and minority or dominant or dominated. Eriksen argues that majority and dominant people are no less ‘ethnic’ than minorities (1993 : 4). Ethnicity is, therefore, not exclusively confined to minority nor to dominated group. It is evident that in some countries that a numerical minority acting as the dominant ethnic group wields a much greater share of power and resources, for example the white minority in the former regime of South Africa and the Sunni Arab minority in Iraq (Esman, 1994). Likewise, ethnicity also refers to the majority group, for instances the black ethnicity in Africa and white ethnicity in Europe and America. Similarly, as the majority

ethnic group, Sinhalese has been found absolutely dominating over the power of Sri Lanka whilst Tamil ethnic minority has been struggling for their rule with their identity in their dominated region. Paul Brass also takes a broader boundary of ethnicity while defining it in a more extensive way. He refers to three ways of defining ethnic groups- “objective attributes, subject feelings, and in relation to behavior” (Brass, 1999 : 18-20). The objective attributes refer to cultural features that separate one group of people from another- this could be language, shared religious practices, diet, dress, linguistic protocols and style of life. Subjective aspects of ethnic group focus on shared experience, identity and feeling. Behavior aspects deal with modes of interaction and relationship which become part of normative nuisances of observable behavior. Hutchinson and Smith also define ethnicity with its multidimensional aspects that include race, origin, ancestry, identity, language and religion. For a comprehensive definition of ethnicity, we could refer to Isajiw, who distinguishes four major approaches in defining ethnicity: primordial, epiphenomenon, situational and subjective phenomenon (1993 : 407-414).

There is another school of thought, supported by ILO and UN, which defines tribe (ethnicity by implication) as deprived indigenous people. ILO’s definition of tribe has two components. One is universal definition of ethnicity or tribe that refers to the people ‘whose social, cultural and economic condition distinguish them from other sections of the national community and whose status is regulated wholly or partially by their own customs or traditions or by special laws or regulations and has a self-identification’ (ILO, 2000 : 7). Another component of its definition is that indigenous people are those who have been deprived socially, economically and politically, hence, ethnic group does not necessarily means the indigenous people. The UN endorses this definition by saying that Indigenous people are those “whose very existence and way of life is under threat” (IWGIA, 2005 : 86). Erica Irene Daes, the chairperson of the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations, used four criteria in identifying indigenous people., They are: (1) The occupation and use of a specific territory; (2) The voluntary perpetuation of cultural distinctiveness, which may include the aspects of language, social organization, religion and spiritual values modes of production, laws and institutions’ 3) Self-identification, as well as recognition by other groups, as a distinct collectivity; 4) An experience of subjugation, marginalisation, dispossession, exclusion or discrimination (IWGIA, 2005 : 93).

Based on above discussion, we can make some assertions about the concept of ethnicity: (1) It is a past-oriented group identification emphasising origins of common descent; (2) some cultural and social distinction; (3) need for a relationship of the ethnic group to a component unit in a broader system of social relation from which to draw its differences; (4) ethnic group can be larger than kin or locality groups as a belief in a common origin; (5) attribute to ethnic categories both in different social settings and for different individuals; (6) ethnic

categories are labels with meaning both for members and for analysts or those outside the ethnic boundaries.

2.2 Approaches to the Study of Ethnicity

Isajiw has distinguished four major approaches and number of sub-approaches concerning the definitions of ethnicity as follows (1993 : 407-409):

- i. ethnicity conceived as primordial phenomena;
- ii. ethnicity conceived as an epiphenomenon: centre and periphery;
- iii. ethnicity conceived as a situational phenomenon: ethnic identity and ethnic groups- instrumental, ethnic group boundaries and ethnic generation; and
- iv. ethnicity conceived as a purely subjective phenomenon: constructionism

Conventionally there are two contending approaches to the study of ethnic politics: **primordial** and **instrumental (structural)** (Stack 1986, Esman 1994, Reilly 2000). According to **primordialists**, ethnic identity is inherited or given, and, if not permanently fixed, at least very difficult to change. It is a subjective sense of shared identity based on objective culture attributes. The “primordial bonds” stem from being born into a particular religious community, speaking a particular language, or even a dialect of language, and following particular social practices. These objective cultural attributes provide a basic subjective aspect of group attachments developed from childhood (Brass, 1994 : 87).

For **instrumentalists**, ethnic attachment is highly adaptive and responsive to changing situations. The boundaries of an ethnic identity can expand or contract over time. In general, ethnicity is a dynamic and flexible element in social and political relationships. Ethnic identity is a social construction; it is the product of human action and choice. Among instrumentalists, some analysts further argue that ethnicity is mainly a practical resource of individuals and groups to promote their security or economic interests. One type of analysis from this perspective is the ‘rational choice and benefits’; a rational choice actor pursues ethnicity when the return is better than other alternatives (Esman, 1994 : 11). Another is the Neo-Marxist approach which holds that ethnicity is a myth or expression of “false consciousness” that conceals real class interest. Ethnic mobilisation is class struggle in disguise and is the result of economic exploitation of dominant classes within and among countries (Maistorovic, 1995 : 37-9).

Both approaches are relevant in describing ethnic politics. Although these two conceptions of ethnicity oppose one another, they help us to understand the phenomenon of overall ethnicity better. While the essentialism of the primordial approach emphasises the fixed

boundaries of ethnicity and the irrational characteristic of ethnic mobilization, the structure or instrumental approach emphasises the variable characteristics of ethnicity and the rational calculation of ethnic mobilisation. In reality, most examples of politicised ethnic identities and ethnic conflicts in the world today “exhibit a combination of both ‘primordial’ accretive associations and ‘instrumental’ opportunistic adaptations, the latter often harnessed by unscrupulous would be ethnic leaders or ‘ethnic entrepreneurs’, who mobilize supporters on the basis of crude but often effective ethnic appeals”(Reilly, 2000 : 4). However, along with all kinds of contradictory social theories, they are complementary and reveal more aspects of social and political phenomenon. Although the instrumental approach appears to better explain ethnic mobilisation, especially about ongoing ethnic conflicts that seek to elevate their unique identity and role in politics, both the primordial and the structural approaches have their explanatory power in understanding ethnic politics.

In addition to primordialism and instrumentalism, Norval (2004 : 271-280) describes **constructivism** as the third approach to the study of ethnic politics. According to her, the theorisation of ethnicity is tied to political concerns and normative judgments so that it requires a genealogical approach. This approach emphasises the historical and political processes by which it is formed and situating it in relation to other identities: racial, sexual, national, or gendered. There is a range of constructivist positions. Norval argues for a materialist poststructuralist theory against linguistic monism. She suggests that “the body” is important, but that markers of race and ethnicity are historical, social, and political rather than natural. Finally she discusses hybridity and postcolonial theories of identity concerned with diaspora, displacement, and the politics of cultural difference. Pluralism must be radicalised in order to democratise potentially exclusionary identities. Likewise, Andreas Wimmer (2002) describes in detail nationalist and ethnic politics in his book –Nationalist Exclusion and Ethnic Conflict. His view can be summarised as follows: 1, Nationalist and ethnic politics are not merely by-products of modernisation; rather modernity itself is structured according to ethnic and nationalist principles, because 2, modern institutions of inclusion (citizenship, democracy, welfare) are systematically tied to ethnic and national forms of exclusion. Correspondingly, 3, ethnic conflicts and xenophobia/racism are integral parts of the modern order of nation-states.

2.3 Ethnicity and Democracy

Relation of ethnicity with democracy is contested. Some believe that democracy can thrive in ethnically divided society and others see that ethnicity and democracy are mutually contradictory. Ethnic conflict and democracy are not convergent for traditionalists. John Stuart Mill’s view was referred by Arend Lijphart, that in the nineteenth century “liberal democracy was nearly impossible in ethnically divided countries because they could not meet the minimum democratic requirement of social and political integration and

consensus" (1977 : 18). Similarly, Robert Dahl also holds that "democracy is impossible when ethnic identities are so strong that ethnic conflicts are constantly violent and are not subject to negotiation" (Dahl 1989 : 255). In the same way, many studies confirm that ethnic conflict, which revolves around an exclusive conception of legitimacy and symbols of worth, tends to be zero-sum and more resistant to compromise in political processes, which eventually leads to the erosion of democracy (Diamond, Linz and Lipset 1995 : 42-3). Hence, a number of cross-national statistical analyses indicate that ethnic cleavages are negatively related to democracy (Hadenius 1992 : 114). Undoubtedly, if the societies have deep ethnic cleavages then democracy is inherently difficult. Many events in contemporary politics, particularly in the Third World, seem to justify that the scale of ethnic conflict is closely related to the degree of democracy. In the multiethnic Third World, particularly since the late 1980s, democratic regimes in Nigeria, Lebanon, and Sri Lanka broke down as a result of ethnic conflict in the form of civil war. In east European countries, democracy has made more progress in Hungary, Poland, and the Czech Republic, where ethnic cleavages have been less important; and it has made less progress in Slovakia, Bulgaria, Romania, and former Yugoslavia where ethnic conflicts have been strong (Horowitz 1994 : 36). Other South Asian countries like India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and even Nepal also experienced crisis and violence under a democratic regime due to ethnic conflict. It seems that most of these countries have responded to the ethnic conflicts by using exclusion and repression as the state policy, and lack of proper democratic means for accommodating the ethnic cleavages due to the stress on the **control model** exerted by dominant group as power holders.

If ethnicity is non-compatible with democracy, then how a state should deal with ethnic groups? The **control approach**, propounded by Lustick (1979), suggests making ethnicity irrelevant systematically. Control refers to asymmetrical relations, in which the hegemonic power of an ethnic group resolves through coercive rules by either a numerical majority or minority, making it unworkable for the subordinated ethnic groups to impose challenges (Mc Garry and O' Leavy 1993 : 23). Examples that can be cited include Russians and other nationalities in the former Soviet Union, Arab and Kurds in Iraq, Tutsi and Hutu in Burundi, White and Black ethnicity in former South Africa. Recently, in Sri Lanka, used this model and defeated the LTTE, which was working for Tamil ethnic minority. The argument of control approach is close to **assimilation approach**. The assimilation approach is more commonly referred to as the "melting pot" approach, wherein "ethnics" forget their origins and assimilate to the dominant culture. It assumes that ethnic allegiances will weaken, even disappear along with modernisation, development, and urbanisation.

The **Modernist and Marxist** approaches argue differently. These approaches underestimate the role of ethnicity in divided countries. Both early modernization theorists and classical Marxists believe that economic development and social change weaken ethnic identity,

although they present different reasons. For the early modernisation approach, economic development gives rise to modern society in which the various primordial ties of ethnicity would gradually disappear. For classical Marxists, national and ethnic identities are subjected to the economic forces of social change and are viewed as an intermediate state along the path from capitalism to international proletarian solidarity (Majstorovic, 1995 : 37; Newman, 1991 : 451-3).

In recent years, both the theory of modernization and Neo-Marxism is revised paying attention to ethnic conflict. However the revised modernization theories still treat ethnic conflict as a dependent variable, suggesting that economic modernization, by increasing ethnic interaction, may enhance ethnic cleavages (Newman, 1991), the Neo-Marxist approach basically regards ethnicity as a form of “false consciousness” and thus ethnic conflict is seen as class struggle in disguise. However, the validity of seeing ethnic conflict as a part of class struggle is challenged. Although some ethnic conflicts include elements of class stratification that reinforce ethnicity as a source of social cleavages, ethnic identity is often more significant than class identity. When compared to class, ethnicity appears to be more ascribable to most of the people due to its cultural depth, effective ties, and the sense of common kinship. It is difficult to treat social class as a solid foundation for collective identity since class boundaries are more fluid than ethnic ones. The reason is that classes, as categories of economic interest, are likely to be subdivided according to differences in skill and income levels (Smith, 1991 : 5). While class status is more responsive to social mobility, ethnic membership is generally given at birth (Horowitz, 1985 : 5). In a cross-national statistical analysis of 86 countries in 1975, the statistical data shows that compared with class, ethnicity has much stronger correlation with political conflicts (Majstorovic, 1995 : 44-8). Rueschemeyer et al. (1992) observe that ethnicity plays a stronger role in some cases they do not examine, and they admit that the conclusion generalised from the selected cases probably underestimate the role of ethnicity in democratic performance in the modern world as a whole.

Coming back to the question of whether ethnicity is complementary or contradictory to democracy, the **power approach** has its own arguments. The crux of the matter is whether state power is monopolised by one group or is distributed to many groups. In multiethnic society, the control of the state is a central aim of contending ethnic groups. When an ethnic group gains control of state apparatus, the state lacks autonomy from the dominant ethnic group. The dominant ethnic group can exercise political hegemony through the state over the subordinate groups. Traditionally, a state is understood as a territorially determined entity with the sole right to legitimate use of force (Max Weber 1964 cited in Talcott Parsons). Among the variety of state powers, “when coercion and violence are strong in the state apparatus, there is less chance for democracy” (Rueschemeyer et al., 1992 : 87).

According to Esman, “ethnic hegemony can be exercised either by repression or by discriminate policies of exclusion, subordination and preference” (1994 : 221-2). Exclusion policies can block access to resources and power of the state and society along with denying citizenship, job recruitment, and political participation to the ethnic minority. Subordination policies endow some rights to ethnic minorities but treat them as second class citizens. If single group controls over the state and its apparatus, then “important economic assets are transferred to the members of the dominate group” (Esman, 1994 : 220). All these politics of ethnic hegemony have negative effects on democracy. Therefore, when the state is captured by the dominant class, it is less likely to promote democracy (Ruescheneyer et al., 1992 : 64). The dominant ethnic group can exercise political hegemony through the state over the subordinate groups. Since power resources are more or less unequally distributed in all societies, the allocation of power resources matters for democratic development. In a cross-national statistical analysis, Vanbanen (1992; 1997) finds that the concentration of power resources is not conducive to democracy; whereas the dispersed distribution of power resources makes democracy possible. In ethnically divided countries, the concentration of power resources in an ethnic group does not facilitate democracy and their dispersion favors democracy. If subordinate groups succeed in controlling the state apparatus, the state gains autonomy from the dominant group and is more likely to promote democracy. In the structural sense, it can be termed “balance of ethnic power”, because balance of power can mean any distribution of power (Sheehan, 1996 : 4).

Distribution of power is the central thesis, argued by **institutional approach**, which makes ethnicity and democracy complementary to each other. In multiethnic countries, institutional engineering can influence the prospects for democracy in terms of resolving ethnic conflicts through a rational inclusive process. In the institutional school of thought, the most prominent model is **consociational democracy** (consociationism) in terms of power-sharing democracy. This architectural model was devised by Arend Lijphart in 1969 in his article ‘Consociational Democracy’, published in *World Politics*. Consociationalism has been successful in securing political stability in some smaller European Countries, such as Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Switzerland. Lijphart (1977) has given the following four major aspects for the success of institutionalised democracy in these countries, which can be applied in order to manage conflicts in other multiethnic and multicultural states, such as in Nepal:

- i. Joint decision making in the form of inclusive grand coalitions;
- ii. A high degree of autonomy for ethnic groups;
- iii. Minority veto usually restricted to the most vital matters;

- iv. Proportionality as the basic standard of the allocation in political representation, civil service, and other public resources among ethnic groups.

All these features of consociational democracy, according to Lijphart, contrast and contradict with majority-rule or majoritarian democracy. In conventional liberal democracy as majoritarian rule, the dominating groups monopolise authority instead of including other excluded and minority power seeker ethnic groups in a state. Indeed, the political power in majoritarian democracy is limited or concentrated in the hands of majority, while consociational model “is to share power, to diffuse and decentralize power, to divide power proportionally, and to limit power” (Lijphart, 1995 : 857).

In multiethnic states, consociational democracy is appropriate for resolving ethnic conflicts through reasonable and rational participation in state affairs from various strata of society. But the validity of this model is challenged. Some argue that consociationalism is profoundly undemocratic because it implies elite domination and would undermine democratic accountability by inflating the power of elites who govern the state within interethnic ruling coalitions. Dissatisfactions are also considered with the power-sharing democracy through a low level of political participation. Furthermore, consociationalism and democracy are incompatible, because ethnic leaders generally prefer accommodation to aggressiveness. The contending factions that struggle for power and leadership within an ethnic community compel their leaders to respond to demands and grievances of their constituents in competitive elections by supporting more extreme positions. This blocks interethnic compromises, leading to the loss of consociational character of the regime (Esman 2000; Lustick 1997). Likewise, one of the most systematic critiques of the theory made by Brain Barry. He holds that the consociational model emphasises formalistic cooperative behaviour of political elites at the expense of manipulative devices and power relations as the condition of political stability in countries. He indicates that, “Switzerland fail to fit the consociational model at every point because of the mildness of ethnic conflict, the use of majoritarian techniques such as binding referenda, and successful challenges to elite decision” (Barry 1975a; 1975b: 480). On the other side, some developed the **hegemonic-exchange theory** in order to produce a more modified approach, which attempted to mix consociational democracy with control and dominance theory. Donald Rothchild forwards the ‘hegemonic exchange’ model including examples of African countries that tradeoffs and bargaining are possible, and ethnic violence can be ended by changes in policies of allocation of power and wealth through mutual accommodation among the representatives belonging to various ethnic groups and regions. The role of the state in this approach is not oppressor but facilitator and coordinator among the various ethnic power seekers. However, the assessment of Phadnis and Ganguly (2001: 46-7) is relevant in this regard, they state that “consociational democracy and the hegemonic-exchange models do not guarantee political

stability in multi-ethnic states, in some cases; they may actually facilitate the rise of ethno-nationalist feelings". However, though the consociationalism makes limit the people will and popular participation as well as democratic competition among the contesting groups, it seems more useful in reducing the conflict and violence with making share and consensus in the polity of the state among and between the power seeker forces. Therefore, many countries have succeeded to maintain peace and stability through consociational system by providing ruling opportunities to the power seeker different ethnic and political forces. As the result, more or less it strengthens in consolidating the nascent democracy in the ethnically and politically divided societies.

2.4 Ethnic Identity in Nepal

Nepali ethnic groups have multiple identities, i.e. *matwali* (people who are culturally permitted to drink alcohol), *janajati* (a group whose society is non hierarchical), *adibashi* (original inhabitants), minority (discriminated by the power structure of the country) and excluded (deprived from opportunity). Before the restoration of democracy in 1990, a derogative word like *matwali* – a collective title granted by old civil code of 1854 – was coined for collective identity of all ethnic groups of Nepal. Other given name was SETAMAGARALI, an abbreviation composed by name of major ethnic groups, Sherpa, Tamang, Magar, Gurung, Rai and Limbu. Following the restoration of democracy in 1990, Nepali ethnic groups officially receive a prestigious title as *adibashi-janajati* (indigenous nationalities). '*Janajati*' is a Sanskrit word, which denotes the meaning of 'births' or 'the form of existence fixed by birth' (Apte, 1992 : 446-450).

Discourse of ethnicity in Nepal is contested in multiple fronts. Does it apply to only indigenous nationalities or other social groups? Influenced by universal definition of ethnicity that it is a distinct group different from others, a political scientist asserts that ethnicity is "a self-consciousness of a group of people united or closely related by shared experiences such as language, religious belief, common heritage or political institutions" (Poudyal, 2005 : 7). Though Brahmin and Chhetri are dominant Hindu castes, there could be 'Bahun ethnicity' or 'Chhetri ethnicity' (Sharma 2004, Bhattachan 1995). Because, like other groups of the people they have their own language, religion, culture and life style, therefore, it seems that they have distinct identity which makes them different from other. Hence, the Hindus of Nepal have shared a common physical, economic, social, and cultural space with other ethnic groups living here' (Sharma, 2004 : 243). In Nepal, the definition of ethnicity has been made with excluding the caste group. This definition is challenged by ethnic activists and scholars while seeking specific meaning of indigenous nationalities. Those who have their own mother tongues and traditional culture but do not fall under the traditional four-fold classification of Hindu Varna system are treated as *janajatis* (nationalities) (Ukyab and Adhikari 2000; IIDS 2002; Gellner and Karki 2007, 2008). The National Foundation for Uplift

of Indigenous/Nationalities Act 2002 defined Indigenous/Nationalities as those ethnic groups or communities who have their own mother tongue and traditional customs, distinct cultural identity, distinct social structure and written or oral history of their own. These characteristics are more or less similar with other mainstream and caste groups of people, who have different culture, history, social and cultural identity. Each common ancestry clan or group has its own distinct culture and social identity, even Brahmin and Chhetri and their various clans have their own tongue, traditional customs, culture, religious practices and their own history connected to their ancestral land and ancient society. But in order to differentiate ethnic groups of Nepal from that of hill Hindu castes, a study team gave an explanatory note that identified the following characteristics of *Adivasis/Janajatis* (IIDS, 2002 : 22):

...those who have their own ethnic languages other than Nepali; those who have their own distinct traditional customs other than those of ruling high castes; those who espouse distinct culture other than the Hindu culture of dominant groups; those who have distinct social structure that does not fall under hierarchical Varna or caste system; those who have written or oral history that traces their line of descent back to the occupants of their territories before the annexation into present Nepal; those who are included in the list of *adivasis/janajatis* published by the HMGN.

Equating Nepali ethnic groups as both *janajati* (nationalities) and *adibashi* (indigenous) is also a subject of debate. *Janajati* and *Adivasis* are two words that are used synonymously by ethnic activists. Only since the UN declared 1993-2003 as the International Indigenous Decade, Nepali ethnic activists have begun to use *adibasi-janajatis* (indigenous nationalities) for ethnic groups of Nepal. A report claims that “*janajati* pertains to social status and the word *adivasi* denotes chronological order/precedence, these words are not synonyms, though some argue that *janajati* may be *adivasi* and *adivasi* also may be *janajati*” (IIDS, 2002 : 17). Some argue that all the nationalities seem to be the ‘indigenous people’ (NAC-IDWIP, Nepal 1994 : 2-3). One asserts that “most of the ‘*janajats*’ are ‘*adivasis*’ or indigenous peoples” in the context of Nepal (Tamang, et. al, 1993). In fact, almost all *adibassi* (indigenous) people of Nepal are *janajatis* (nationalities) but all *janajatis* are not *adibassi* because the recorded history of the settlement of some *janajatis* in Nepal is not as old as those of Hindu Brahmin and Chhetri.

Do janajatis fall into the category of minority? The combined population strength of 59 listed ethnic groups is 37 per cent, higher than accumulative size of dominant hill Brahmin and Chhetri (30 per cent). Numerically none of 101 caste/ethnic group constitutes a majority. Even the largest group, Chhetri, has strength of 15.8 percent in total population of the country. So, numerically Nepal is a country of minorities. But *Janajatis* are considered as minority in terms of caste/ethnic based distribution of power and they, therefore, also fall

into category of excluded and marginalised groups. High caste hill group, i.e. Brahmins-Chhetris are treated as the dominant group, because of the elites from these strata of the population dominant position in the various organs and power structure of the country. Others who have been historically 'discriminated' are considered as the minority. This is a widely accepted and adopted approach for the study of ethnicity in Nepal (Hachhathu, 2003; Neupane, 2000; IIDS 2000). The division of groups as per the 'dominant and subordinate' or 'majority high caste group and the minority ethnic and Dalits group' is mostly used in dealing with the question of inclusion and exclusion in the context of the Nepalese ethnic politics.

Discourse on Ethnicity in Nepal

Nepal is a multi-ethnic and multi-lingual society, a diversified state composed of many castes, ethnicities, linguistic and religious groups. 'Nepalese society is a plural society with different ethnic, identity, cultures, languages and dialects, scripts, literatures and religions' (Ukyab and Adhikari, 2000). The Census 2001 shows that the hill high castes Hindu, Brahmin-Chhetri and Thakuri altogether make up major and dominant group while remaining different ethnic and Dalit groups are subordinated and excluded from the power structure of the state. Ethnic movement was noticed in the early '50s. However, it was revived in the '90s. Today, it has been transformed into political power along with the change of political regime (from monarchy to republic) and the prospect of state restructuring in the post-April 2006 period. The following section captures the significant story of ethnic movement in Nepal in theoretical and academic perspective.

The writings in Nepali ethnicity do not strictly follow the conventional primordial or instrumental model. Some scholars relatively favour primordial model and others prefer the instrumental model. Authors, such as Gurung (1998), Bhattachan (1995 and 2000), Lawoti (2005), Burghart (1996), Neupane (2000) and others adopt the primordial approach for their anthropological study of ethnic politics in Nepal. Others who gave greater weight to instrumental model are Sharma (2004), Dahal (1995 and 2000), NESAC (1998), Gellner et al eds. (1997 and 2002), Fisher (2001), Lecomte-Tilouine et al eds. (2003) and Hachhethu (2002, 2004, 2008). However, in confirmation to the statement that none of the primordial or instrumental approach solely suit to understand the rise of ethnicity in Nepal. Therefore, Sharma observes that "the ethnic politics of Nepal in the 1990's seem to have elements conforming with both the primordialists and the instrumentalists models" (1997:483). Whilst, Gellner discusses the theory of ethnicity in Nepalese context as "primordialists vs. instrumentalists or modernists" in details in his contribution –Nationalism and Ethnicity (1997 : 6-12). He further claims that "one should not assume that ethnic activists and ordinary people share the same agenda" (Gellner, 2001 : 5). Hence, he describes two alternative models of ethnic accommodation against the traditional Nepali model as follows:

“...first, the view of all Nepalese as equal citizens, with no formal recognition of collective units (different cultural traditions celebrated merely as heritage and folklore), and second, the multicultural position that ignores ethnic identities simply institutionalises Parbatiya, and especially Bahun, privilege, so that, in order to strengthen the nation, collective (‘ethnic’ or ‘national’) identities must be given formal recognition” (Gellner, 2003 : 115-116).

For giving space to multiethnic and multiculturalism as well as to accommodate their demands, the pluralist model is inadequate. Yet a pluralist model of national culture has emerged with the hope that despite increasing demands for a place at the national level, few ethnic activists, and fewer still of their potential followers, “will to depart from it altogether” (Gellner, 1997 : 28). There is still strong logic for the pursuance of pluralist model as is manifested in the argument of one scholar, “multiculturalism or the plurality of Nepalese culture must be accepted officially in every field of life” (Dahal, 1995 : 168). The ethnic demands in Nepal primarily focus on the manifestation of a sense of denial of rightful citizenry as a whole. It seems that the most urgent problem is to address ethnic grievances through rational inclusion, rather than to discuss models as the means. Therefore, Chondok states that, “in Nepal, ethnic politics that aim are fundamentally redefining the identity of the polity suggest that ethnic groups who have been till now excluded from political and economic resources should be granted access to these resources through quotas or reservations”(2003 : 5).

The dominant approach to the study of ethnicity in Nepal is to illustrate it as struggle against discrimination. The Hindu power holders have almost dominated the state apparatus along with the fact that the systematic exclusion of minorities in nation building processes has occurred since the post-unification period (Burghart, 1996). Kramer is of the view that, from its inception, the unified modern state of Nepal has been the playground of high caste Hindu elite groups. Simultaneously, the numerous ethnic groups and the lower Hindu caste were “marginalised” and “prevented” from “active political participation” (2003 : 227). For almost all of its political history, Nepal has been under the control of authoritarian values of Hindu power holders which oppressed, suppressed and deprived the various ethnic and Dalit groups. The situation did not change substantially even when the Constitution of 1990 recognized Nepal as a ‘multi-ethnic and multi-lingual’ country. It imposed Hindu religion upon the people and retained the traditional concept of ‘Hindu kingdom’. The primacy given to Hinduism and Nepali language is mainly due to pressure from Parbatia Hindus from across the political spectrum; that indicate the dominance of the Parbatia ruling elite has continued into the modern democratic era (Pradhan, 2002 : 14). Although the Nepali state recognised the multiethnic and multicultural nature of society, it still refused to introduce the inclusive process for “a broader participation of the disadvantaged sections of society” (Kramer 2003: 228). Hachhethu argues that, “ethnic upsurge is inevitable in Nepal as the historical process

of national integration is exclusionary” (2003: 233). Against this background, ethnic movements in Nepal are the natural outcome of age-old suppression, and a result of the imposition of a stratified hierarchical model by the Hindu rulers of Nepal (Gurung, 1999: 18). Sharma (2004) observes that the ethnic leaders of 1990s allege that they have been subjected to political oppression, economic exploitation, social subjugation and cultural annexation by the Hindu state in the present as well in the past. On limits of impact of ethnic conflict to national integration of Nepal, Bennett suggests that “ethnic diversity itself is not necessarily inimical to a peaceful and prosperous state – as long as there are institutions in place that permit disagreements between different groups to be worked out in the political arena rather than through violent conflict” (2003: 35). Likewise, according to Sharma, “most of the people in Nepal have liked to believe that, despite its cultural diversity, the history has been marked by an ethnic harmony in multi-ethnic society, free of all kinds of ethnic tension” (1997:472). But on the other hand, David Gellner comments that “the ethnic harmony may have been exaggerated” (1997:6), while Bhattachan asserts that it is a “blatantly manufactured myth” (1995:125). In Nepal, ethnic articulation has neither a content of secession nor urge to replace the dominance of state power by a particular ethnic group but there is demand for sharing the state power equitably with distributive justice in a multiethnic society. The Nepali state therefore, can play a constructive role of “mutual empowerment” rather than “mutual apprehension” in the society’ (Kumar, 2000: 43).

Discourse on ethnicity in Nepal has been heightened as a consequence of ethnicisation of insurgency, carried out by the Maoists in 1996-2006. Although restoration of democracy in 1990 was accompanied by the rise of ethnicity, the state largely ignored this new development. The Maoists cultivated this for its people’s war. People from various ethnic groups were dedicated to this war while the Maoists assuring them to establish “ethnical autonomous regions”. The CPN-Maoist has published, as a common minimum policy and programmes of United Revolutionary People’s Council Nepal (URPC, 2004), section VIII under the title of ‘Nationalities and Regional Question’. In this document, CPN Maoist focuses on the federal structure of state on the basis of ethnic identity and oppressed regional territories for the political, economic, cultural and educational development of the people in general. Since then, particularly in pre and post CA election, although either to hold the ethnic groups as strategically or to empower them as rationally, whatever, Maoist has been put forwarding the interests of ethnic politics. However, the impact of the Maoist’s war is seen in the ethnic issue gaining strong visibility. Moreover, it has provided the new weight for ethnic activism and identity politics.

2.5 Inclusive Democracy through Ethnic Accommodation

Nepal’s case is different from traditional liberal democrat’s proposition that democracy and ethnicity are contradictory. In Nepal ethnicity has close links with democracy, Ethnic

movement was noticed with the dawn of democracy in 1950 but it was later suppressed by an authoritarian party less Panchayat system that survived for 3 decades (1960-1990). Such movements surfaced again after the restoration of democracy in 1990. The restoration of democracy with the principles of popular sovereignty, equality, freedom and cultural rights provided a platform for ethnic activism (Hachhethu, 2003; Chandok, 2003). The account of conflict across the ethnic borders has rapidly proliferated in the aftermath of 1990 revolution due to at least two reasons. First, changed climate in which scientific research occurs: until the end of the 1980s, any hints at potential social conflict by (foreign) scholars had been actively discouraged by the authorities. The second reason is the actual increase of overt conflict situations after 1990. While ethnic conflicts occurred long before the 1990-awakening, its success has opened “a Pandora’s Box of old grievances, leading to contestations of their public displays deploying pejorative symbols” (Hachhethu, 2003 : 138-139). Furthermore, the reinstatement of democracy in April 2006 has encouraged demands for restructuring Nepali state in the form of inclusive democracy.

A 19 day long April (2006) revolution characterised by huge demonstrations and general strikes succeeded in reestablishing democracy. The major outputs of this revolution were a republic democracy and federal structure of the state. In addition, since the April revolution, the NEFIN has organised demonstrations in order to seek rational representation of ethnic groups in the polity with various rights, including ethnic autonomy with self-determination rights. This movement was resolved by the agreement made in between NEFIN and the state. The government and the NEFIN inked a 20-point deal on August 7, 2007. The major provisions of their agreement are: 240 Constituent Assembly seats under First-Past-the Post system to be “proportionately inclusive”, constitutional guarantee of at least one representative from all 59 indigenous groups in the CA, alternative arrangement for representation of groups failing to get elected through either the proportional or first-past-the-post system, formation of State Restructuring Commission (SRC), adoption of ILO convention 169; ratification of UN declarations on the rights of indigenous people, women from indigenous nationalities to get priority in development plans and programs, recognition of local languages as official language in government offices (The Kathmandu Post, August 8, 2007).

One of the major agendas of project of restructuring Nepali state is to transfer it from unitary to federal state. Now the debate on the nature of federal units is under way as how they should be formed, whether on the basis of ethnicity and region or by other factors. Most of the ethnic activists and the Maoists are in favour of constituting ethnic based federal units, while other activists, political parties and intellectuals are considering multiple factors, like ethnicity, economic development, natural resources and geography. Federalism

is supposed the best form of system to promote inclusive democracy which in turn renders service to resolve the ethnic conflict as it encourages identity and power sharing.

2.6 Magar: A Distinct Ethnic Group

Among 59 listed indigenous nationalities, Magar has a distinct identity as revealed by several case studies. Kawakita has done a case study on the social and economic aspects of Magars of the Myagdi district (1974). In this study, he covered social, cultural and economic aspects of Magars of Myagdi district, but did not touch upon their political life. Similarly, Hitchcock has also carried-out a case study of Magar of Bardanda of Syanja district. He argued that Magars of Banyan Hill are changing their social and cultural values and practices due to direct contact with Hindu people (Hitchcock, 1966). Hitchcock's study covers only the cultural aspects of the Magar. In the same manner, Gary (1982) has also conducted a case study of the Magar community of Arkhala village of Nawalparashi. He has focused on cultural and socio-economic aspects of Magar communities of the northeastern part of Nawalparashi. Oppitz (1982) has also done in-depth research in Rolpa and Rukum regarding origin of 'Northern Magar' (Budha and Gharti) by citing three different stories as well as death and kinship patterns within the community.

Among the native researchers, Baral Magar has conducted a cultural anthropological study of Magar of Palpa, Syanja and Tanahun in 2039VS. He describes in detail the customs and rituals of Magar communities of this area along with their historical identity (Baral Magar, 2050VS). There are several other books on Magar and other ethnic groups of Nepal. Among them Shrestha et al (1975), Sharma (2037), Gautam and Magar (1993), Gellner et al (1997, 2002), Bista (2000), Onta et al. (2058VS), Kauchha (2060VS), Bhattachan (2000, 2003), Lecomte and Dollfus (2003) and Sharma (2004) cover the religious, cultural and socio-political aspects of ethnic groups. Most of these studies also shed light on the Magar people along with other ethnic communities of Nepal.

There are some pieces of research on Magars in different parts of Nepal which have been conducted by MA students and submitted to the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, TU. Among them, Sapkota (1993) conducted his research on Magar in the Geja village of Palpa and has concluded that Magars have a sense of ethnic identity, unity and rigidity, and also that their way of living is rapidly being sanskritized. Likewise, Dhakal (1994) conducted a research study in Nawalparasi. He has mentioned that the Magar society of the Kaligandaki river basin of Nawalparasi is influenced and shaped by their ecological environment, and that their ecological milieu is also affected by their socio-cultural and economic practices. Khadka (1995) found that the hill Magars of Arghakhanchi are in a miserable condition due to lack of infrastructure development, influence of Hindus, old agricultural patterns, low literacy rates and poor economy. Bhudahthoki (2002) also

conducted his research work on the Magars of Kandebas in Baglung. His conclusion is that Magars of this village are highly influenced by Hindu culture. Recently Purja (2004) has done his research work in Kathmandu and Lalitpur. He found that the Magar activism is limited more in urban areas, rather than rural ones and they are more Hinduised in rural villages than urban areas. Likewise, there are some research reports, such as Sanghini Rana Magar (2062VS) and Krishan Bahadur Thapa et al (2063VS), which are concerned with the historical ethnic identity of the Magar women, and culture and religion of the Athar Magarant respectively. All these research works are concerned with the economic, cultural, religious and socio-anthropological aspects of Magars. However, there is no research work so far related to the political aspect of Magar in any district of the western region of Nepal.

Magar people are the distinct ethnic group by their own identity, language and culture. They have their own history as one of the earlier settlers in the western hills where supposedly they had ruling power over the political entity at the local level. They also had many village level states (chiefdoms) in *Barha* and *Athar* Magarant as the southern and north-western Magar territory respectively. The big settlements of Magars are found in the territory of Magarant. The existence of the *Bheja*, particularly among the southern Magars, suggests that they have their own traditional ruling system. The history also portrays that they are famous for getting involved in war as warriors who took part inside and outside the country. They have their own languages such as *Dhut*, *Kham* and *Kaike*, the first one is found in Barha Magarant and the other two in the Athar Magarant. Magar also have their own distinct traditional customs that differ from other indigenous and ethnic groups of Nepal. They espouse cultural practices distinct from the Hindu culture of dominant group, such as animism-shamanism that have been practiced since ancient times. Likewise, Magar have a distinct social structure that does not fall under the hierarchical Varna or caste system, but in an egalitarian horizontal division between ethnic groups. They have different written or oral histories that trace their line of descent back to the occupants of their territories predating their annexation into present-day Nepal. They have their own distinct ethnic characteristics despite some Hindu influence through the ruling elites. However, through all ethnic characters found in the Magars, they deserve a status as an indigenous-nationality. Consequently, the government has included Magars in the list of *adivasis/janajatis* on its publication.

Moreover, the previous discussion presents that the feeling of distinct ethnic identity and recognition from the state and non-state level are the prominent factor for constructing the ethnic group. Therefore, their primordial ethnic identity is followed or not, the feelings of Magariness stems from kinship along with some sort of cultural and racial values recognition by the formal and informal sectors of the society. All

these factors construct the Magars as a distinct ethnic group which is different from other communities of Nepal.

In terms of language, culture, clans, religion and settlement, Magars are diverse communities. So far ethnic identity is concerned, Magars have more or less common ties of primordial bond of consideration towards racial values and homogeneousness. From a primordial perspective, the Magars throughout the country have similar type of culture, religion, and ancestor tie, while from an instrumental perspective, it is also a heterogeneous group with a fluid and unorthodox boundary along with the feeling of excluded and marginalised ethnicity in the polity of the state. Hence, the activists are striving for the revitalisation of the ethnic identity of Magars. The advocacy of ethnic activism in terms of language, culture and religion has been seen as the primordial type of consideration. However, each ethnic group such as Magar has its distinct ethnic features that could be defined and constructed through their population and land, language, religion, clans and culture.

It has already been aforementioned that Magars have been called straightforward and brave people. They had a close relation with the Rajput Thakuri who migrated first in their territory from northern India in around 12th century. Likewise, during the time, the Khas Nepali speakers from the Khasan came to settle and rule over the northern Magars. Having a close link with the ruling Khas, Magars gradually forgot their own language and religion and adopted the ruler language and culture. It is also suggested that they had blood ties with the Rajput and the generation from this kinship called Shaha ruled over the Magar tribal group and its territory particularly in the Barha Magarant. Therefore, southern Magars had significantly contributed in the unification of Nepal that was initiated by the Shaha rulers of Gorkha state. After the unification of Nepal, the state tried to build a nation through the policy of one language that was Nepali and one religion that was Hindu. Due to good relation with Hindu rulers and interaction with their Nepali language, Magars gradually lost their own religion and native language. Some Magar accepted different culture through Sanskritisation because some of them had good positions in state's army which was dominated by Hindus. Hence, the heterogeneous character of social composition through the migration of Magars to Hindu communities and some Hindu groups who settled in the Magar community increased the cross cultural values. Likewise, in the urban hubs the Magars from ex-army background, particularly those of British and Indian, came and settled in the cities and favoured the Sanskritisation process. Moreover, during the modernisation phase, new values are discovered through the achievement of modernity and interaction with the global trends. As a result, they knowingly and unknowingly gave up their previous lifestyle, traditional values and identity as well.

Therefore, Magars as an ethnic group have changed their earlier language and culture due to the impact of state's assimilation policy as well as their interaction with Hindu population, and their desire of follow the modern lifestyle in the urban hubs of the state and abroad.

2.7 Rise of Magar Ethnicity

As already mentioned in above paragraphs, the different studies deal that Magar has been unprivileged from the state power structure. This explains the rise of Magar ethnicity against high caste hill group dominated state. Nevertheless, this ethnic group, unlike many other ethnic groups, adopted state's old policy of assimilation for material benefits. However in the post-1990 era Magar activism rose in order to seek recognition for its identity along with access to natural and economic resources and greater representation in political structure of the country. Its activism has two parts: integration with other ethnic groups for which NEFIN provides a platform; and a separate movement, which started even before the Maoist insurgency. Recently, rise of the Magar ethnicity is blended with the Maoist insurgency, as explained by two French Anthropologists.

Two French scholars, Marie Lecomte Tilounie and Anne de Sales are well known for their work with Magar people and their connection with Maoist Peoples' War in the last decade. Tilounie has contributed some research work on Magar politics (2002, 2003, and 2004) as one of her research works titled 'The History of the Messianic and Rebel King Lakhan Thapa: Utopia and Ideology among the Magar' (2002: 244-277) indicates. She has discussed and analysed the case of a Magar rebel of the nineteenth century whose story shares many features with that of the Maoist guerrillas. She further states that the current situation will help to articulate the recent reinterpretation and instrumentalisation of this old rebellion within the framework of ethnic and/or political Magar movement. Anne de Sales has conducted a wide and in-depth study on the Kham Magar of the west hills. She has developed a chapter on 'The Kham Magar Country: Between Ethnic Claims and Maoism' (2002 : 326-357). According to de Sales, the ethnic movements are organised primarily around three themes of 'Bhumi', 'Bhasa', 'Dharma' ('land, language and religion'), a phrase, which recurs like a ritual formula in the activists' discourse. She states three factors (i.e. forest, poor economic conditions and local Magars population) in this article through which the Kham region has become a Maoist stronghold. One factor of the Magar population in the Kham region can be assimilated to other places of Magars in respect to widening the Maoist war. In this study, she has concluded that the focus of Kham Magars on their identity in relation to their country has to be viewed as the response of individuals who are caught in a bind. She further stresses that once the crisis has passed, however that may come about, they will abandon their dream of autonomy and their principal aspiration will be to merge

into the wider Nepali population. Although, this analysis was made more than six years ago, her judgment still represents the real grounds of ethnic and Maoists politics.

2.7.1 Quest for Power along with Identity

Magar as the major ethnic group has the decisive role in the Janajati movement. This type of activism has been put forward by the NEFIN as the common platform for all indigenous nationalities. Some common issues like secularism, reservation, Buddhism, proportional representation, inclusive democracy and rights of indigenous nationality are the founding principle of the ethnic movement. Hence, after their participation in the April (2006) revolution, the issue of *janajatis* have become more political and their movement strong. Therefore, some remarkable achievements are gained. Nepal has been declared a secular state soon after the success of revolution. It was the popular step for ethnic activists as they had been alleged the Nepali state favouring the Hindu religion. It was the basic objective of their activism on religion who succeeded in increasing the number of Buddhists through their anti-Hindu campaign, particularly during 2001 census. Not only religious case, they have achieved reservation in many institutions of the state organs through which each ethnic group has succeeded in sharing the authority of state. Hence, they are forwarding their activism for seeking more ethno-political rights in order to get ethnic federal autonomy based on each of their identity.

Besides those shared interests with other janajatis, Magar as a distinct ethnic group has initiated separate movement to seek more ethnic rights with Magar identity. They succeeded in declaring Lakhan Thapa Magar as a martyr of Nepal who revolted against the Rana despotic system. Hence, the Magar movement wants the state to declare Lakhan Thapa Magar as the first martyr of Nepal. Likewise, Magar activists largely succeeded in convincing the Magars in general that their religion as Buddhism not Hindu though many activists argued that they are the followers of animism and shamanism. For the last few years, *Maghi Parba* as the Magar festival has been declared national holiday by the state. Political parties also give priority to Magar activists in their organisations and in the polity of state. Hence, different political parties established their Magar organisations as their sister organisation. As the recent development, Magar organisations of various political parties and NMA are united with the tag of *Samukta Magar Manch* –Joint Magar Forum (SMM, 2065). The main purpose of this forum is to achieve the Magar ethnic federal autonomous region and sub-autonomous regions for self rule by the Magar themselves. They perceived that without gaining their own federal autonomy, Magar would not be privileged politically, economically, culturally and ethnically. The main theme of this common Magar movement is to seek Magarant provincial autonomy in the west hills. They want to promote their language and culture as well as empower the Magars in their proposed ruling territories.

2.7.2 Common issues of Magar ethnicity

In order to give pressure to the Constituent Assembly and constitution making process, all political and non-political Magar institutions seem to be working together with 'Magar common Forum' which was established a year ago. Since then Magar activists have been strongly putting forward their demands collectively seeking more political rights with their identity. The foremost demand made by the forum is to determine the interests and rights by abolishing the ethnic, language, religion, culture, gender, social, economic and political discrimination of state. According to a document of the Samukta Magar Manch, it has following objectives (SMM, 2065):

-) To restructure the state on the basis of right to self decision and ethnic and regional autonomy,
-) Historical territory, ethnicity, language, culture, region, population and natural resources should be the basis of creating federal units,
-) To determine the Magarant autonomy and sub-autonomy on the basis of right to self determination and ethnic, regional autonomy,
-) To guarantee the inclusive, participatory and proportional representation of the Magar ethnicity in the whole state structure,
-) To establish secularism, rule of law and ethnic equality,
-) To make effective implementation of international treaties and declarations ratified by Nepal those are related with indigenous nationality,
-) To be committed for the nationality, people's life, national integrity and peoples rights.

Since the interests of Magars are solicited recently by its own organization, there is lack of academic literature on strategy and objective of the Magar community. Its political participation and involvement has also been treated partly in association with the Maoist's people war. This study is therefore a primary contribution to the Magar Ethnicity and Politics. The available literature shows that most studies focus on the Magar society, culture, and language but do not explain the political dimension of the Magar ethnicity. So this study would be significant to explore new dynamic of ethnic politics, the Magar ethnicity in particular.

CHAPTER III

CONSTRUCTION OF MAGAR IDENTITY

Out of the 59 ethnic groups of Nepal, Magar holds the largest population, that is, 1,622,421 (7.14% of the national population of the country). Though Magars' habitats spread all over the country as well as in many parts of eastern and western India (Gautam and Thapa Magar, 1994), their presence is significant in some areas, particularly in the western Hills of Nepal. It is the first major group in six districts (Palpa, Baglung, Rolpa, Tanahun, Pyuthan and Myagdi), the second largest group in four districts (Syangja, Rulum, Surkhet and Syalan), the third major group in eight districts (Udayapur, Sindhuli, Mustang, Parbat, Gulmi, Arghakhanchi, Dolpa and Dang), and the fourth largest group in six districts (Dhankuta, Okhaldhunga, Ramechhap, Gorkha, Rupandehi and Jajarkot). Magars have their own distinct ethnic features such as language, territory, clans, culture, ritual and life style which differentiate them from other caste and ethnic groups. So, as with the case of many other ethnic groups, Magar identity is also constructed by a combination of various factors like history, homeland, language, religion, culture, etc.

3.1 History of Magar and Magarant

The names assumed by the Magar ethnic group vary in accordance with their respective areas of settlement. In the eastern part of the country, Magars are called 'Mahar', in Sikkim 'Chyang', in western areas 'Pare', and in the Karnali region 'Mahar' (Baral Magar, 2050VS). Buchanan Hamilton (1971) uses the term 'Mungurs' to refer to the Magars. According to Baral Magar (2050VS), the Magarant region was called 'Maharlok' in the ancient period; the people of this region were then called 'Mahar', which became 'Magar' as time passed on.

There is no exact historical account about the origin of the Magars, that is, about when and where they arrived from in the areas that fall under the territory of the present Nepal. One speculation is that Magars, a Mongolian tribe, had migrated from Mongolia via Tibet before 3100 BC. Hamilton (1971) argues differently that some Magars migrated from northern India, and many other scholars have argued that Magars, originated in Tibet-China, and migrated to Nepal during the early history of Nepal (Thapa, 2036VS; Baral Magar, 2050VS; Budha Magar, 1993; Ahearn, 2004; Thapa Magar, 1994). But there is no written history of their migration to Nepal. Adhikari (1993) speculates that "Magars must have come from their place of origin by way of Tibet and since they show no traces of Buddhism in their religious activities, they most likely arrived in Nepal before Buddhism was introduced to Tibet in the seventh century" (Quoted in Ahearn, 2004 : 3). However, Magars as Mongoloid

stock must have come to Nepal from Tibet, China, or from northeast India at various times before the medieval period.

Magars are basically divided into two groups—Southern Magars or inhabitants of Barha Magrat and Northern Magars or settlers of Athara Magarat—and such division is also linked with their migration from different places. Hitchcock states that “the differences in between both Magar communities—northern and southern Magars—seem that they are different groups and migrated at different times” (1966 : 4). However, Shepherd states that at least five different groups spoke different languages, yet each group claimed that it was the Magars. He believes that “those successive groups of immigrants arrived and who settled near them [Magars] might have taken on the Magar name” (Shepherd, 1982 : 11-2). The southern Magars themselves like to say their territory as Barha Magarant, where the majority of Thapa, Rana, and Ale clans inhabit. They largely practice Hinduism and speak the Magar language from the Tibeto-Burman language family. But the Magars in the northern part of the Nepalese Hills particularly belong to clans such as Pun, Budha, Roka, and Gharti. These Magars are the speakers of Kham language and it is supposed that in relation with previous Magars they are less Hinduised. Within Nepal, the Magars are believed to have spread out from “Yoma Khar of Hukam-Maikot Village Development Committee (VDC), Rukum” of West-central Nepal. All Magar respondents of Myagdi district, whom the researcher interviewed, said that their ancestors migrated from the west, that is, Rukkum and Rolpa. It is also said that the Magars evolved from two types of caves, Pelama Khar Pu (barely dispersing cave) and Yoma Khar Pu (hornet’s cave), from where they scattered in all four directions (Budha Magar, 2059VS). Basically, they have spread throughout the country since the unification of Nepal in 1768. However, they are the main dwellers and proper inhabitants of western Hills, where “undoubtedly the best and purest Magars are found to this day in large numbers” (Vansittart, 1993 : 82).

The present western hill of Nepal, as discovered by several researchers, is the homeland of Magars. Witzel (1993) writes that ‘The Magart’, a huge area mainly settled by Magar tribes, extends from Bheri in the west to Budhi Gandaki in the east, and is fairly uniform in its nomenclature. River names invariantly end in **ri** or **di**. The names that end in **ri** are found in the western part, that is in Kham Magar territory, and those ending in **di** are in the eastern part of the Magart. Major H. R. K. Jibs' view is that “Magars are indigenous people of Palpa, Nepal. They are scattered and have settled all over Nepal, especially in central and western parts of the Kingdom for the last 700 years” (qtd. in Baral Magar 2050VS : 22). The names of the places and rivers between Bheri to Marsyangdi, particularly of the Kali Gandaki (a famous Himalayan river in central Nepal) which was traditionally known as the Gandak region, seem to have been derived from the Magar language. “The area west of this, to the

Karnali, was called Magarant” (Bista, 2001 : 12). This reveals that Magars have occupied this area for a long time.

Magarant has been categorized into two areas—Athara Magarat and Bara Magrat. The northern Magars, who inhabit Athara Magarant that includes Kham, Chantel, and Kaike use the Athara Magaranti language and punctuation⁴. The northern and western hills, i.e. Rolpa, Rukum, Salyan, Baglung, Myagdi and other parts of the surrounding areas are dominated by these Magars. There are four main communities; ‘Thabang, Lubang, Taka and Maikot’ in the Kham Magars' settlements in the districts of Rolpa, Rukum, and in the western part of Dhaulagiri along the Bhuji and Nishi rivers (Molnar, 1984). The Magar who have settled in the periphery of the Kali River in the south Hills speak ‘Magar Dhut’ as their mother tongue and they are known as Barha Magarant. Palpa, Tanahun and Syangja are the major districts in terms of their aboriginal settlements in this Magarant. The distinction between Magars from both sides of the north and south can be classified into two groups on the basis of their professions: the *agri*, those who used to work in mines, and the others, who used to work in farming and animal husbandry. Above discussions show that Gandaki region known as the Barha Magarant and Rapti-Bheri region known as the Athar Magarant are the prime territory of the Magarant, which are also called the eastern Magarant and western Magarant respectively (MNLF, 2063VS). However, the following tiny principalities are given as the Barha Magarant in the centre and lower parts in between the Rivers Rapti and Marisyangdi, Satahung, Payang, Bhirkot, Dhor, Garahung, Risung, Guirung, Gulmi, Argha, Khanchi, Musikot and Isma (Gimlette, 1993; Vansittart, 1993). The Gorkha principality that led the unification of Nepal was also a part of the Magarant region. So, the Gorkha King Prithwi Narayan Shaha, who unified Nepal, said that he was the King of Magarant (Whelpton, 1997; Budha Magar, 2053VS).

Magar is a distinct ethnic group whose ethnic boundary is made by different identities like ancestry and clan, language, shamanism and animism of religious, cultural practices, life style and historical attachment with certain territory. Among the Magars, some cultural rituals of Barha Magarant, Athara Magarant and Dolpa are found slightly different (Budha Magar, 2053VS). Although Magars themselves are heterogeneous ethnic group who practice different cultures and life styles, they have primordial ethnic identity and ethnic boundary which has constructed distinct ethnic identity and contributed significantly to making them separate from other ethnic and caste groups.

How long has an ethnic boundary of Magar existed in Nepal? One needs to go back to the history of Nepal around 10th century BC when there were three strong principalities in the present Nepali territory – Tirahut in the east, Kathmandu valley at the centre and Khas in the

⁴ Some years earlier, Chantel activists claimed that they constituted a distinct ethnic group and have separated from Magar organizations to establish the Chantel organization for Chantel people.

west. A territory to the west of Kathmadu valley and to the east of Khas – later known as Baise-Chubise rajyas –existed as gray areas of indigenous and ethnic settlements where a system of chiefdom of different castes and ethnic groups, particularly two major ethnic groups Magrat and Tamuwan operated.

The Magars had their own principalities in the western hills of Nepal⁵, like that of Khas in far western hills, Tamang in central hills and Kirantis in eastern hills. It seems that the first places where the Magars settled in Nepal were the Gandaki and Rapti regions because Magars had their own ruling territory called Baraha Thum which was a part of the Baisi-Chaubisi principalities from the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries. According to Eden Vansittart, “This bit of country was divided into twelve districts (Barha Thum) and the residents there came to be known as the Magars of the Barah Mangarant” (1993 : 84). Lt. Col. G H D Gimlette (1993), a resident surgeon in Kathmandu who stayed from 1883 to 1887, states that “the tribe, the Magars, the hill people whose original seat, the Boramungrauntor (Barhamagarant), comprised of Satahung, Pyang, Bhirkot, Dhor, Garahung, Risung, Ghirung, Galmi, Argha, Khachi, Musikot and Isma, the central and lower parts of the mountains between River Rapti (of Gorakpur) and the Marichangdi. These were the Magars’ tiny states which gradually went under the rule of the Khas-Thakuri and the Rajput-Thakuri in the 14th and 16th century respectively.

The existence of Magarant as a political unit in the form of chiefdom is evident in the following two accounts: one, Bamshawali (the history was told on the oral statements) stated that there were many petty principalities of Magar in Magarant before these areas were invaded by Khas in around 12th century and later by Rajput, who migrated from Chitor, India, in around 15th century. A system of ethnic rule was present parallel to the political unit of several principalities, discovered by several researchers including Kirk Patrick (1811/1975), Francis Buchanan Hamilton (1819), Iman Singh Chemjong (1948), Krauskopft and Meyer (2000). For instance, Myagdi was under the rule of the Thapa Magar in the ancient time. It is also estimated that ‘Thapa’ is not the clan but is the title or symbol of ruling dynasty. The meaning of 'Thapa' in Tibetan language is Mongol or Mongolian which meant the ruling class⁶. Till now there are many kots like Takam, Wim, Niskot, Pula, Ghatan, Gajne, Jyamruk, Rakhu, etc.

⁵ For the Magars’ independent entities, see in detail, Lecomte-Tilouine 2000; 2003; Baral Magar 2049; 2050; Rana Magar 2052; Thapa Magar 2050; Thapa Magar 2036; Budha Magar 2049, etc.

⁶ According to *Bamsawoli*, these Thapas are the ruling elites as the Bagale Thapa as the Chhetri caste whereas, some sociologist and historian like, Dor Bahadur Bista and Hamilton have mentioned in their literatures as those were the Magar but they became Chhetri along with taking ‘Janai’ (the wholly threat) by the Indian priest (DDC-Myagdi 2062VS: 1-2). “...the Thapas, Karkis, Majhis, Basnets and Kharkas all now considered as Hindu and Khas were branches of Magar tribes” (Hamilton 1971: 28) and also see, Fatalism and Development (Bista 1991/2001)

which have been preserved since the unknown past and they are the symbols of the Magar ruling village states. Wherever Kots existed, supposedly almost all of them were the Magars' petty principalities of the ruling territories (DDC-Myagdi, 2062VS).

According to some Magar activists in Myagdi, Khadkas and Mallas are the succeeding generations of the ruling family of some villages of Myagdi district, whose ancestors migrated from west Khas of the Karnali region. Based on what their ancestors have said, the Magars claim that a village where they have now settled was first ruled by the local Magars. No Magars ruled perfectly because they were straightforward and simple. Likewise, a senior Magar activist in Pokhara, who migrated from Myagdi, told a story, as said to him by his ancestors, that previously Ghara was a Magar ruling village state. The Kahdkas who had migrated from the west to the village gradually held the ruling power over the village and then traditional ruling Magars migrated to the upper hills called Khibang and Shikha. Relatively Ghara is in lower hills, so it is plain and fertile. Some Khadgas in Pokhara who migrated from this village told the researcher that they still have some Khadga and Tarwar (swords) as the symbols of the traditional ruling weapons⁷. Baniya (2004), a historian of Myagdi also found that the Chhetri came from the west and occupied the ruling power from Magar chiefdoms. Likewise, Myagdi River from which the district got its name is actually a Magar name. Myagdi is a word that has been derived from the original word 'Mengdi' combined of two words, 'Meng' and 'de', in which 'Meng' means 'Thapa Magar' and 'de' means river or water. Therefore, the river which flowed in the Thapa Magar territory was named Myagdi. Along with the name of the river, other names of many places were also derived from the Magar language. Therefore, we can deduce that these parts were under the Magar rule.

In the Magarant of the Gandaki and Dhaulagiri regions, there were many Magar settlements which had been ruled by the Magar chiefdoms. Before invasion, followed by migration, by the ruling Khas Chhetris from the west Karnali region, there were many Magar chiefdoms who ruled over these Magarant territories (Baniya, 2004 : 4-6). Below is a brief account about how Magars came under the rule of Rajput Thakuri.

History says that Bhupal Rana, the first migrant from the Chitaur (northern Indian) after the Muslim invasion, moved to the hills of Nepal and stayed in the Barha Darlam (part of the Magar territory in the south). His descendent Jain Khan, (son of Micha Khan and the grand son of the Bhupal Rana) established the Aalam Devi in Lasrgha which he himself had brought from Chitaur. Jain Khan became the King of Lasargha

⁷ Personal talked with Narayan Khadka and Khil Dhoj Khadka of the Ghara now they are settled in Pokhara.

after getting married with the Magar girl. His generations thereafter ruled over the Khillung, Bhirkot, and Nuwakot. Bichitra Khan, the son of Micha Khan, who ruled over Nuwakot, became the King of Kaskikot, a small hill part of Kaski. The greater Kaski state was established by Kulmandan Khan (Jagati Khan), the son of Bichitra Khan after defeating the Ghale king of the northern Kaski (Subedi, 2060VS). History shows that Kaski was ruled by Kulmandan Khan who had migrated from Magarant region at first (Subedi, 2060VS). The emperor of Delhi was pleased with the gifts presented by the king of Kaski; as a result, he gave him the 'Shaha' title to the king. Then he was known as Kulmandan Shaha instead of Khan. His generations started to rule over the Lamjung state and then the Gorkha state. With the assistance of Magars, the Gorkha state had been founded by Dravya Shaha, the then prince of Lamjung, at the end of the 1590s in the territory between Chepe and Budhi Gandaki rivers. Prithvi Narayan Shaha, the king of Gorkha, who laid down the foundation of modern Nepal through the warfare, also belonged to this dynasty, and claimed that he was the king of Magarant. However, Palpa, Kaski along with Lamjung, Tanahun, Gorkha and other small states were founded assimilating the village chiefdoms under the rule of Shaha dynasty. Similarly, Magars lost their ruling power over Athar Magarant region due to the domination of the Khas tribe from the Karnali region.

The second point that explains the existence of Magar chiefdom at one historical point is the *Bheja* system. In the traditional Magar villages like eastern Palpa, village level governance is still organized by the traditional distinct institution called *Bheja*. It seems the oldest institutional heritage of the Magar civilization though the governance jurisdiction of *Bheja* was limited with extension of the modern Nepali state and values of the governing authority at local level. However, each person is supposed to be a member of *Bheja* and no one can avoid or deny the rule of its governed society⁸.

⁸ Researcher found an interesting event during his field study in Palpa district. One day he went to CPN-Maoist party's office to see the local leaders and to collect some official data. Most of the leaders were outside the office for their programme. The office was handled by a very young boy called Aalok. He nicely managed researcher's problem along with calling one of the local leaders of the Maoist party and introduced him with an activist from MNLF (Magar National Liberation Front). After some minutes while they were talking, seven young Magars including two women came and requested activist for resolving their case as the conflict between villagers and them. Bheja exiled them from the village due to their affiliation with Christianity, where the traditional religion was shamanism under the Hindu values that have been governed by the Bheja in the village. Therefore, Bheja decided to punish them for giving up their village tradition and adopting the Christian religion. They were not allowed to take part in any activity performed by Bheja. It is because that every person and every house is supposed 'to be a member of Bheja'. Without an affiliation with Bheja, no family or person is allowed to stay in the traditional Magar village. The researcher was surprised when the leader of the MNLF explained why they left their religion and accepted a strange foreign religion! He further said "all of you became Christians for economic benefit and it is OK! You could take money and hold the jobs which are provided by the foreign Christians or their organisations, but you could not give up your village customs that is your part of life". The reason for mentioning this thing is to show the value of Bheja. No one can easily deny

Normally, the *Bheja* chief is elected in the mass meeting of the community, who has the ruling power to manage and govern the society in terms of monitoring and patronizing their traditional norms and values.

Western hills, once the homeland of Magars, is justified by the present human settlement in this area by caste/ethnicity. The Western region has the highest Magar population, which secures 16.43 percent of the total population of the region. More than 50 percent of the total Magar population resides in this region. The Western and Mid-western regions, especially the Lumbini, Gandaki, Dhaulagiri, Rapti, and Bheri zones, are known as the 'Magarat region', where 71 percent of the entire Magar population of Nepal lives (Baral Magar, 2060VS). Over time, Magars migrated elsewhere in Nepal so they spread all over the country. Below is the details of population distribution of Magars in their traditional homeland of the western hills and in other areas they migrated later.

the jurisdiction of Bheja as the traditional ruling organization in the aboriginal Magar villages, particularly such type of tradition is found in the east and south of the Palpa district (also see, Dhakal, 1995; Thapa, 2005).

Table No. 3.1

Development Region-wise Magar Population

Development Region	Total Population	Magar Population	Percent
1. Eastern Region	5,274,302	176,350	3.34/10.97
<i>Mechi Zone</i>	1,249,311	33,866	
<i>Koshi Zone</i>	2,105,446	62,949	
<i>Sagarmatha Zone</i>	1,919,545	79,535	
2. Central Region	7,952,381	248,745	3.13/15.47
<i>Janakpur Zone</i>	2,524,730	97,896	
<i>Bagmati Zone</i>	2,973,076	101,840	
<i>Narayani Zone</i>	2,454,575	49,009	
3. Western Region	4,569,014	750,851	16.43/46.69
<i>Gandaki Zone</i>	1,485,955	211,324	
<i>Lumbini Zone</i>	2,526,868	399,304	
<i>Dhaulagiri Zone</i>	556,191	140,223	
4. Mid-Western Region	2,709,687	391,540	14.45/24.34
<i>Rapti Zone</i>	1,133,949	266,836	
<i>Bheri Zone</i>	1,398,428	121,283	
<i>Karnali Zone</i>	177,310	3,421	
5. Far-Western Region	2,179,508	40,645	1.863/2.53
<i>Seti Zone</i>	1,319,201	29,767	
<i>Mahakali Zone</i>	860,307	10,878	
Total	22684892	1608131	7.07/ 100.00

Source: CBS, 2002.

As per Table no. 3.1, there are three zones—Gandaki, Dhaulagiri and Lumbini—in the western development region, among which the Lumbini zone has the highest Magar population with 399,304 (53 %). Palpa, the main district of the Lumbini zone, has a larger number of Magars (51 percent of the total population of the district) in comparison to the remaining 74 districts of the country. In the Gandaki zone, Tanahun has the largest Magar population, where 84,332 Magars (26.75 percent of the total district population) inhabit. Among the three zones of the western region, Dhaulagiri holds the highest Magar population with the number 140,223 Magars, which is 25.21 percent of the total population of the region. The highest number of Magars is found in Baglung district with 74,550 inhabitants, which is 28 percent of the total population of the district. Myagdi is the second largest district in terms

of Magar population, where 42 percent of the total Magar population lives. Kapilbastu, Manang and Mustang are districts in the western regions, where the Magar population is very nominal in comparison to the total populations of those districts (See, Appendix 2).

Likewise, according to table no. 3.1, among the five development regions, the second largest region in terms of Magar population is the Mid-western region with 14.45 percent out of the total population of the region. This represents 24.35 percent of the total Magar population in the country. Among the total population of this region, Rapti zone covers 68 percent whereas, Bheri 31 percent and Karnali 1 percent respectively. Magars have settled largely in Rolpa, Dang and Pyuthan districts of the Rapti zone. Out of the total population, the Magar populations in Rolpa and Pyuthan districts occupy 44 and 30.65 percent respectively. Surkhet is also a major Magar populated district, where the Magar population occupies 20.63 percent of the total population of the district. Karnali zone constitutes 5 districts within which the Magar settlement is significantly found only in some VDCs of the Dolpa district alone. The central development region is in third place in terms of the Magar population. This region is only occupied by only 3.13 percent of the total Magar population. Bagmati, Jankpur and Narayani zones are located in this region. Among these zones 45 percent Magars out of the total Magar population of the region are settled in the Bagmati zone alone. There are 8 districts in this zone and among them Kathmandu and Dhading are the major districts that share 61 percent out of the total Magar population in the Bagmati zone. It seems that most of the upper class Magars, such as ex-army (British and Indian) as well as high ranking Nepali security personnel and some businesspersons reside in the centre of Kathmandu. Out of three zones of the central development region, Janakpur is the second largest zone in terms of Magar population which is occupied by 39 percent. Among the 6 districts of this zone, Sindhuli and Ramechhap districts together have 65 percent of the Magars out of the total Magar population of the zone. Out of the total population in Narayani zone, the Magar population is found to be only 2 percent. It seems that Makwanpur is the only district of the zone where the Magars are found in significant numbers within the zone. In all most all Tarai region Magars have less population compared to other hill tribes and caste people (Appendix: 2).

The Eastern region has only 3.34 percent Magar population out of the total population. Mechi, Koshi and Sagarmatha zones in the region have 33,866,62,949 and 79,535 Magar population respectively. There are four districts in Mechi zone in which Jhapa and Ilam districts have major population of Magars with 13, 507 and 12, 719 respectively. In the six districts of Koshi zone, Morang and Dhankuta districts have major Magar population. Likewise, among the 6 districts of Sargarmatha zone, the Magar population is most notable in Udayapur district only which has 14 percent Magars out of the total population of the district and has 50 percent Magar population

out of the total Magar population of the zone. In the view of the Magar settlement, the Far-western region has a very nominal population in this respect. There is only 1.8 percent Magar population out of the total population of the region and 2.5 percent out of the total Magar population of Nepal respectively. According to the 2001 census, there is only 4.16 percent Magar out of the total urban population. The Western region has the highest urban Magar population of the country with 40 percent. There are many urban cities such as Butwal, Pokhara, Bhairahawa, Waling, Syangja, Damauli, Tansen, Baglung and Beni where Magars have migrated from the surrounding hills. Particularly Pokhara and Butwal are such urban hubs in the western region where mostly Magars and Gurungs have migrated from the periphery of these places. These cities are not only the urban centres but also places of the British-Gurkha Camps. Therefore, most of the Magar and Gurung ex-armies have settled in these places. In addition to this Magar settlement, the Appendix- no. 2 also deals with their densely populated districts in terms of the Magar population in the Magarant region and other parts of the country. Some more information about the homeland of Magarant region is given below.

As mentioned above that the Magars themselves supposed that they are broadly divided into two major sub-groups known as Barha Magrant and Athara Magrant regions in terms of southern and northern Magars respectively. According to an oral history, Magars of Barha Magrant region had BarhaThum of twelve village states before or during the alleged Rajput migration from northern India. This pit territory is on the periphery of the Kali River, particularly to the south of this river. The Magars have significantly settled in the centre and south territories of the Kali River. Among the Magar clans, particularly Thapa, Rana and Aale clans have settled here. These Magars have a long tradition of serving the nation in the security forces. Palpa, Nawalparasi, Tanahun, Gorkha and Syangja are major Magar populated districts in this Barha Magrant region. The 'Dhut' as a Barha Magrant language is the native language among the Magars in this region. In Magar Dhut, the water is called 'di' therefore, most of the names of rivers in this region end with di, such as Madi, Marsyagndi, Modi, Mardi, and so on. The Rajputs, who had first settled in this Magar region after migrating from northern India around 12th century and some Khas, who had been here earlier than the Rajputs, were the Nepali and Hindu speakers. They gradually controlled over the ruling power through the village level authority or through extending the petty principalities in the Barha Magarant. Therefore, Magars from Barha Magarant region have been more influenced by the Nepali state and Hindu ruler than those Magars from Athara Magarant region who came in contact with the state later. Magars from Budha, Rokka, Pun and Gharti clans who have

settled in Palpa, Kaski and Myagdi are supposed to be migrants from their aboriginal territory, Athar Magarant region.

The next part of the huge Magar settlement called Athara Magrant region is located in the periphery of the Rapti and Bheri River. Most of the Pun, Rokka, Bhudha, and Gharti Magar clans have settled in this region. The Magars of this region use 'Kham' or 'Pang' as their mother tongue. Some Magars of Dolpa district use their mother tongue known as 'Kaikhe' language. Rolpa, Rukkum, Pyuthan, Salyan, Dolpa and Baglung, the places of the Magar inhabitants who originally came from 'Yomakhar' of the Hukkam Maikot VDC of the Rukkum district, are also located in this region. The names of the rivers in this region are made by adding the word 'ri' as prefix, which means water in Kham language, as in, 'Thuli Bheri', 'Sani Bheri', and 'ridi'⁹, etc. Although, there is no fixed territorial demarcation line between Barha and Athar Magrant regions, it is supposed that the river called Nisi-Bhuji is the border river that divides these Magar settlements. It is interesting to note that the huge Magar settlements of these two Magar territories, from Myagdi to Gulmi districts, that is, from north to south, do not speak their mother tongue.

Magar activists also talk about a myth relating to Magar clans and territory. According to the myth, 12 brothers of Barha Magrant and 18 brothers of Athar Magrant were all ancestors of the Magars. There are seven main Magar clans: Thapa, Rana, Aale, Pun, Rokka, Budha, and Gharti. Among the clans, Thapa, Rana, and Aale are found largely in Barha Magrant region whereas Pun, Rokka, Budha, and Gharti are predominant in the Athara Magarant of Kham region. Each clan has more than 100 sub-clans and titles. Therefore there are more than a thousand subtitles and sub-clans of the Magars (Baral Magar 2050VS, Baral 2062VS). Notably, many of such titles are similar to Brahmin and Chhetri titles in Barha Magarant region and Athar Magarant region respectively (Baral Magar, 2060VS; Budha Magar, 2058VS).

It seems that the major settlement of the Magar is Barha Magrant region which lies in the Western region where 50 percent of the total Magar population of Nepal resides. As they claim, out of the total Magar population of Nepal, 71 percent is found in the Magarant region, along with the western and mid-western regions. Therefore, it seems that the Lumbini, Gandaki, Dhaulagiri, Rapti and Bheri zones are the densely populated Magar areas and this territory with their population is supposed to be the

⁶ The 'Kali River' is one of the famous rivers in the western hills located in between the Magar speakers of both settlements, Barha and Athar Magarant. Kali River is called 'ridi' in the Magar language and it is thought that this word was originated from a combination of two words 'ri' (in Kham) and 'di' (in Dhut) that both mean water.

Magarant region. Magars have their historical attachment with this 'Magarant region' because of their indigenous identity.

3.2 Language

Native Language is one of the important elements for constructing identity of a ethnic group. People who consider Magar as their mother tongue, in comparison to other ethnic groups like Tamang, Tharu, and Newar tongues, are lesser in number than the total population of the Magar ethnic group. This explains that they were highly assimilated into mainstream language, Nepali in the past but now the trend has reversed. Those who consider Magar as their mother tongue have increased from 1.42 percent in 1981 to 2.30 in 1991 and to 3.39 in 2001. Magars have their own mother tongue and they have been divided into two types. The first is the Magar language used in the districts of the Western region such as Palpa, Syangja and Tanahun and other districts, and then the second language spoken in the Mid-western region such as Rolpa, Rukum, west Baglung and Dolpa districts. The first is derived from Tibeto-Burman, and the second from Tibetan language group known as Barha Magaranti Bhasha and Athar Magaranti Bhasha respectively. Athar Magaranti language is divided into two categories known as kham and Kaike language. Kaike language is used only in the Tarakot village of Dolpa and the number of speakers of this language is only 791 as reported by the last census in 2001. Besides this village, almost all the Magars speak Kham language as their mother tongue in the Athar Magaranti region.

The more common Magar languages are Magar Dhut and Magar Kham (Pang). The Dhut is used as Barha Magaranti language in most of the Western region and Kham is used as Athar Magaranti language in Mid-western region. There is a debate regarding the name given to Athar Magarant language known as Kham or Pang. Actually both mean 'language and talk' (Thapa, 2063VS : 35), whereas some arguments are found in favour of Athar Magaranti Bhasha instead of Kham Bhasha (language). It is because Kham language is meant to be 'the language used by uncivilized or non-nationals' (Budha Magar, 2060VS: 53). However, Kham language is more common and usual among the Magar activists and experts. Although Dhut and Kham both mean language, each represents some sort of Magar ethnic identity. The Dhut and Kham are also called the Barha and Athar Magaranti Kura which are more identified as the southern and northern Magars respectively. Almost all historical Barha Magarant territory is now included in the Western region, but the area of Myagdi and Baglung which is supposed to be the Athar magarant region is also the part of the region. People from northern Myagdi told the researcher that they were migrants from the

west Kham region and some Magars of old generation still know a few Kham words, though most of the young generations do not have such knowledge.

According to the Census report of 2001, around 47 percent of the total Magar population uses the native language. Although the census data shows that there is an increase in the number of Magar speakers, in reality Magars do not frequently speak their mother tongue (Purja, 2004; Baral, 2005; 2008). Among the total Magar speakers, the use of the Magar language in urban areas is limited to only 37 percent of the total Magar speakers (CBS, 2002). It shows that those Magars who reside in rural parts speak more in their mother tongue than those in urban areas. Due to the process of urbanisation and modernisation, people in the urban areas use Nepali while interacting with different groups of people. People get socialised through other usual languages, rather than the mother tongue, in their formal and informal schooling for career building. However, the increasing trend of Magar tongue users has been in progress according to the latest two censuses held in 1991 and 2001 which shows that Magars have been trying to speak their mother tongue, particularly in urban areas, through the revitalisation of language under the slogan ‘Magars should learn Magar language for strengthening their ethnic identity’. Following table displays the region-wise total Magar population and the Magar language users.

Table No. 3.2

Development Region-wise Magar Speakers

S.No.	Development Region	Magar Population	Magar Tongue	Percent
1.	Eastern Region	176350	137454	77.94
2.	Central Region	248745	103943	41.79
3.	Western Region	750851	399956	53.27
4.	Mid western Region	391540	98728	25.22
5.	Far western Region	40645	20628	50.75
	Total Population	1608131	760709	47.30

Source: CBS, 2002.

The above table presents the figure of the Magars who speak their mother tongue. Magars of Eastern region use their native language more, whereas in the Mid-western and the Central region, there are very few Magar speakers. In comparison to other regions, the ethnic activism has been more prevailing in the eastern part. Therefore, along with other

ethnic groups known as Rai and Limbu, Magars are also more conscious of their identity and culture. In the Central region there are only 42 percent Magar speakers out of the total Magar population of the zone. Out of their total population in the country, 50 percent Magars have settled in the western region. Among them 53 percent Magars speak their mother tongue. The census report of 2001 indicates that the Magar from Mustang, Myagdi, Baglung, Kaski, Parbat, Gulmi, Arghakhachi, Kapilwastu and Rupendhaehi districts in the Western region are largely non-speakers of their mother tongue. Likewise, only 25 percent Magar native speakers are found in the Mid-western region. There are very few Magar speakers in Bheri zone in comparison to Rapti and Karnali zones. The 2001 census shows that almost all Magars of Karnali zone speak their mother tongue, whereas only 24.4 percent Magars of Rapti zone speak their mother tongue. In Far-western region, 51 percent of the Magars speak their mother tongue. Although, there are no Magar speakers in Bhajhang, Bajura, Baitadi and Darchula districts, Magars in Doti, Kailai and Dadeldhura districts speak their mother tongue (See: Appendix: 2-1).

However, the previous discussion reveals that Magar language can be divided into three sub categories—Magar Dhut, Kham and Kaike. Among these, Magar Dhut is the most common language in almost all parts of the western region. Besides the Magar Dhut, Kham language is also a bit in use among the Magars of northern Myagdi. Due to the domination of the Nepali language, the large segments of the population do not know their mother tongue. However, Magar language is more used in day to day life in the homogeneous settlements among the southern Magars. Moreover, some Magars, over the years, are trying to use their mother tongue through the language revitalisation activism initiated by NMA for seeking ethnic identity.

Though many Magars do not speak mother tongue because of historical process of assimilation into Nepali language (details in following chapter), but Magar language is still alive and the recent census data indicate the rise of awareness regarding their own mother tongue among the Magars. This, in turn, facilitates the construction of Magar identity as a distinct ethnic group.

3.3 Religion and Culture

Although the religious beliefs among the Magars seem controversial, the earlier settler and indigenous ethnic groups' inclination to animism and shamanism are largely seen in their rituals and rites. Along with other many janajatis, Magars are also influenced by the Hindu religion and culture (details about assimilation into Hinduism in the next chapter). Despite the influence of Hindu religion and practice, the Magars, either from the lower Hills or upper Hills with their own ethnic environment and so believed in

shamanism and animism. 'The area where the Magars have preserved their own original culture the most is in eastern Palpa, southern Syangja, and Tanahun' (Baral, 2050). Most of the religious and ritual activities are done with the initiation of 'Bheja' in each Magar village in the eastern Palpa. In traditional villages, Magars offer the *puja* to nature that exists in the forms of trees, stones, rivers, and to their ancestors. They follow neither Hindu nor Buddhist rituals. They just worship natural power and their forefathers. Some Pun Magar activists in Pokhara also claimed that such types of considerations are still found in the original settlements of Pun Magars in Baglung and Myagdi. As observed by the researcher, many divinities and deities, who are regarded as their ancestors or ghosts (*Bhut, Pret, Bhayar-Bhume*), are found in the region among the Magar community to whom they perform rituals on a regular basis. Magars in some hamlets of these villages offer Puja once a year and sacrifice the male sheep or goat to the Bhairav as the god of power to whom they worship at an altar close to Dhaulagiri Himal which is far from their villages. Almost all Magar clans mainly worship their ancestors in the form of Kul Puja. Magars worship Baje-Bajei and Mandali in Palpa, Syangja and Tanahun. They worship Karpakeli-Phemala in Myagdi¹⁰. Most of the Magars go back to their villages to worship these gods and goddesses.

The birth of a child is supposed to be a happy occasion and death of a person is sorrowful in all communities. Magars also perform both rituals with happiness and sorrow. Some Magars observe birth ritual as pollution for 6 days and some others for 11 days. Likewise, in some communities they perform rituals for 3 to 5 days by adopting Kutumba or Jhankri while in some other communities they perform a 13 day ritual for death by inviting a Brahmin priest. They do Chhainti on the sixth day on the occasion of a new birth; Pasni, a rite ceremony for feeding grain to a baby when he/she becomes 5-6 months old. Along with major Hindu festivals they perform other local festivals and cultures and observe them in their own way which may vary from community to community and village to village. The researcher found that Magars of 54 households who are supposed to be the earlier settlers in the village of Baranja-Myagdi worship and celebrate the *Aago Dheu* festival, whereas other Magars and other people of the same village are not allowed to participate in that celebration. However, it seems that almost all festivals and rituals are related, either to their ancestors or mysterious spiritual power. Besides Bhaje-Bajai, Mandali and Karpakali

¹⁰ *Baje-Bajai* and *Mandali* are the spiritual ancestors of Thapa- Rana-Ale Magars. *Baje* was Sindhu Rana, *Bajai* was his wife and *Mandali* was his brother in law. There are many wonderful stories regarding these ancestors. *Karpakeli* was a honey hunter and archer who used to live in upper Myagdi. According to oral history that is found among the northern Pun Magars he did much famous charismatic work. *Femala* was his wife. No one saw them die; it is believed that they all just disappeared.

as their major ancestors to the Thapa-Rana and Pun clans respectively, they extensively believe in Ghost, Bhume and other evil and mysterious things. Magars occasionally offer worship to them adopting the shaman (*Dhami-Jhankri*). Similarly, they believe in the nature of power such as big tree, forest, hill, rock, river, etc. and worship them. Therefore, though they are Hinduised by the sanscritisation in Hindu society, most of their rites and life style are originally based on shamanism and animism. Moreover, these various rites, rituals, customs and festivals are Magars' culture through which they are separated from other ethnic and caste groups, and claim a distinct ethnic identity.

Magars are culturally rich in terms of various distinct festivals, food habits, dress-up and lifestyles. They eat chicken, black pork and buff and drink alcohol, play music and dance in order to celebrate religious festivals and culture. Some use red Tika and some other use the white Tika at their festivals, while others disagree with celebrating festivals, arguing that the Tika is irrelevant to Buddhism. In Kaski, most of the Magars use red Tika while, in some Magar dominated villages like Histan of Myagdi and Pipaldanda of Palpa, they offer white Tika. But in Baranja of Myagdi, the western part of Palpa and Somadi, Magars use the red Tika and perform many festivals that resemble those practiced in Hindu society. It shows that Magars perform some cultural aboriginality, particularly in the homogenous villages, whilst they have some sort of mixed form of culture in the village where they have settled with people of different ethnic groups.

Magars originally inhabit the west hills of the Chure Pahad, Mahabharat up to the high Himalayan areas, such as Nawalparasi and Surkhet to the Dolpa and upper hills of Myagdi, close to the Dhaulagiri Himal. They have different kinship, ancestral legends, and geography which shape their differences in physiques, features and culture. Normally they have average height of a Nepali, but some northern Magars who live in the high hills are tall due to "the Bhotial blood in them" (Gautam and Thapa Magar, 1994 : 26). The skin pigmentation of those Magars who live in the upper hills is brown and the Magars who settle in lower hills and plains have dark brown complex. They have small nose and the eyes exist epicanthic fold with slight eyebrows. Due to modern way of life, Magars have gradually introduced the individual family structure by splinting and fragmenting the old heritage although they have basically joint family cultural system. Magars have traditionally preferred to marry in a close kinship such as between daughter of maternal uncle and his nephew (*Mama Cheli-Phupu Chelo*). As the tribal endogamy and integrated family, they stress on cross-cousin marriage system. Nowadays, because of the educated and

modern Magar youth, this system is less prioritised. Some well educated Magars said that “some of our bad trends such as marriage with close kinship and over drinking habit resulted in our backwardness and less intellectuality. The marriage system in close blood relation biologically also proved to be unfit for good generation, therefore, we are gradually giving up this system”¹¹.

The researcher observed a marriage ceremony based on this system that took place in the rural Magar village of Palpa where the demands of the bride side were higher than that of the bridegroom. There was no priest or priesthood system, and all marriage functions were performed by the Kutumba. There was an interesting thing that the people who participated in the bridegroom side waited for at least two hours to enter the bride’s house till the bride’s maternal uncle (*mama*), who is very essential in such function, came for the ceremony. The bridegroom paid his respect to the parents and uncles of the bride's side providing them with local wine, alcohol and cloths. Likewise, the researcher got an opportunity to participate in the marriage function in rural village of the Myagdi district. In this function the bridegroom went to the bride's house who was his own maternal uncle’s daughter by relation. He requested bride’s mother for their marriage. He helped for harvesting the crops. The researcher also came to know that the bridegroom, who is son in-law, has the responsibility of doing all the household works. Whereas, in Hindu society, people give much priority and respect to the bridegroom and his relatives and all the marriage rituals are performed by the Hindu priest.

The major occupations of the Magars in the Barha Magrant region are agriculture and animal husbandry. Some Magars in rural areas have skillful hands in wood and stone work. Traditionally some northern Magars had been involved in the mine industry. However, the Magars particularly from Barha Magarant region have been in the army service since the unification movement of Nepali. Hence, they became well-known for their bravery in the warfare mainly through their recruitment first in the British-East India Company and then in the British-Gurkha and Indian army. They have significantly contributed to both Nepal and abroad through army service. Many district headquarters in the Western region have been transferred into modern urban cities in the region due to the migration and settlements of the Gurung and Magar British ex-armies from rural villages. The lifestyle and dress up of the Magars are found different in urban centers and rural areas. Magar women in Pokhara,

¹¹ The view was delivered by a senior Magar activist, Ksherjung Baral Magar, in his interview with the researcher, who has Ph D degree in management and written a book called Culture of the Magars of Palpa, Syangja and Tanahun and many articles about the Magar culture and language. Likewise, Asbir Saru and Pradeep Rana of Palpa, Pradeep Pun and Kumar Pun of Myagdi, almost all are either bachelor level student or have the masters degree expressed similar type of version.

particularly from the British-Gorkha family background, wear lots of gold and diamond ornaments. Men use only one or two gold ring in their fingers. So far, the Magars in villages have few pieces of ornaments made of gold or silver. Both, Gurungs and Magars in Pokhara prefer to marry their daughter to a well off family. And most of them want to go abroad for earning more and seeking 'standard' life. It is called 'Lahure' culture in Pokhara. So as a result of this culture, most of the youths and their family want to see them in foreign employment particularly in British-Gurkha service or other civil job in western countries rather than focusing on higher education and career in Nepal. The life style in relation with village seems complex in the urban centers. The young generations prefer to use modern and western dresses. Hence, due to impact of global interaction and modernization their life styles are affected and they tend to enjoy day to day technology and modern life rather than confining to their own traditional culture and way of life.

On the other hand, Magar people in villages struggle for survival and lead their simple life style. In villages Magars grow buck wheat, millet, paddy, beans, barley, maize, potatoes, etc. Their life style in terms of eating, drinking and dress up are simple in villages. They consume around half of their production of the grains in producing local wine and alcohol. Drinking alcohol and eating meat is normal for Magars. They produce a large amount of alcoholic beverages and take it with meat in the special ceremony and festivals. The researcher observed that be it in Myagdi or in Palpa (Magars dominated places), they consume alcohol and wine made by them but majority of young people don't like it. Some adult and old people drink throughout the day. Hence, the scale of consumption of these things is larger if it is a festival or a ritual. Even in death rituals either they adopt the Hindu priest or Shaman/Kutumba for purification, they produce various types of alcohol and wine in large amount and sacrifice chicken, goat and hog. Chicken and goats are commonly consumed by the Magars of northern and southern region. In particular ceremony and rituals, the Magars from the south prefer black hog while goats or sheeps are used instead by the northern Magars like Pun in Myagdi. Likewise, the Magars especially, Thapa and Rana from the south make Bara, a kind of bread made of black grams, whereas, Pun Magars like to use *sel roti* (round bread) and other special foods that are also common among the high hill non- Magar communities in their special functions.

The use of alcohol is a major trend in every Magar village and hamlet in the western region. Magars, particularly those of older generation, drink alcohol from early morning to late

night¹². The researcher has found many other cases and trends as such in rural areas as opposed to urban areas. It seems that they are busy in their farming and use alcohol in order to avoid the cold and tiredness. In their traditional lifestyle, particularly in the ethnic strata and remote villages, they cannot afford the sugar tea that is available in modern society. Therefore, it seems that offering local alcohol is a common cultural practice for the courtesy of the guests or relatives¹³.

Along with other local festivals and customs, Magars celebrate the Udhauli-Uvauli, Chandi and Bhairav puja, etc. They perform different types of folk dance such as the Kaura, Ghatu, Sorathi, Saleijyo, Sarswoti Khali Thulo Nach, Maruni, etc. Dances seem to have their own ethnic values in their culture. The contents of their songs and dances are related to love and Hindu epics. These types of cultural symbols are only popular among the older generations. Most of the youths either do not know how to perform such cultural practices or are not interested in these things. The researcher had the opportunity to observe such culture in Pipaldanda twice during his field study. Men and women sat together and sang songs throughout the night. But he did not see any youth participating in such culture. In contrast, the young generation prefers the modern and folk Nepali and Hindi songs in their cultural programmes instead of their own culture. Likewise, due to motor road some of the modern dresses, drinks and foods are now available even in rural areas. Therefore, the Magar life in the villages is also gradually changing into modern way of life. Dinesh Rana, a young activist, told the researcher that most of the youths like such songs and music rather than their own, and no one was well-known about such cultural shows. There are a few old people who know about the aboriginal culture of the Magar but young people do not like being asked about it¹⁴.

Magar activists however insist on the revival of original beliefs and culture. They also insist on wearing Magar dress as a sign of their identity. Magar activists usually attend social functions and ceremonies attired in ethnic costumes organized by NEFIN, NMA and PS. In such functions activists encourage the Magar people to adopt and wear the Magar dress in order to establish their ethnic identity. The Magars have been using their own dress for some years but it is gradually being abandoned. In Myagdi and Palpa some activists told the researcher that some years back whatever

¹² The researcher was also offered alcohol in many houses. In some places, the researcher was questioned how he could study about the Magars without taking alcohol. Therefore, some time he took little bit for respect while many a times he escaped strategically feigning some health problems.

¹³ Pradeep Pun of the Histan, Lal Bahadur Pun of the Baranja, Padam Budha of the Somadi and Man Bahadur Rana of the Pipladanda said that it is usual for an ethnic tribal group to consume alcohol and that most of the Magars like it.

¹⁴ Interview with a young activist, Dinesh Rana of Pipal Danda in Palpa on 2063/5/23.

clothes they needed they used to make themselves. In villages, where there is no trend of joining foreign army services, they still use the clothes made by themselves. The researcher found such trend in the rural areas of Palpa and Myagdi. In Palpa, he noticed that still Magar women use black dresses as their own which are different from the dresses worn in urban centers mainly by the families of the British army. Almost all Magars and Gurungs use similar type of dresses in order to show their ethnic identity. Magar women are differentiated from Gurung ones by the use of a cotton belt. Gurung women use blue cotton belt but the Magars use a yellow one.

Particularly in western centre Pokhara, Magars and Gurungs use the ethnic dresses for symbolising their own ethnic cultural identity. Their dresses are unique and distinct which seem different from other groups of people. Women use Makhamali Choli and colourfull Lungi (*Ghalek*) with shawls. Originally these were made of sheep or goat wool. Likewise, men use short cotton cloth called Kachhad, shirt and Istakot (half coat) with Bhangra¹⁵ which are mostly made by them even today. Kachhad is just a piece of white upswing cloth and they tie it with belt and a local knife hanging in Khurpeto. The researcher has found many Magar and Gurung people in villages with these types of dresses. He has also seen many old Brahmins and Chhetris using such dresses in traditional society. However, it is different from modern dresses and represents the traditional civilization through old generation, irrespective of any caste, ethnicity, religion and region.

Although ethnic activists try to revitalize their traditional identity, Magar costumes are gradually being replaced by the modern imported dresses. In the city area like Pokhara, the Magar ladies and boys are seen in modern fashions. Those who are associated with Magar organisations use unique colorful dress occasionally in their ceremonies. They claim that they are their own ethnic dresses but in reality it is said that they have adopted these from other Asian indigenous societies since they encountered with such cultures during their life time in British-Ghurkha ruling system. According to Baral Magar (2005), ‘these dresses are imported from foreign countries especially Makhmali choli and Lungi that are copied from the countries of the South East Asia. The Istakot (half coat) used by the male is not the Magar dress. It was brought from the indigenous people of Pakistan¹⁶. Moreover, these are gifts from people who worked in the British Army. Therefore, one senior activist described it as “the ‘GESO Culture’, not the Magar Culture” (Budha Magar, 2061: 34)¹⁷. It seems

¹⁵ *Bhangra* or *Bhangro* denotes a kind of coarse cloth made by spinning thread of the plant called *Bhang* (Hemp).

¹⁶ Also the information gathered through the interview with Baral Magar on 2063/4/10.

¹⁷ Also the information collected through talking with Budha Magar on 2063/9/5.

that the urbanisation and modernisation process on the one hand, and interaction and interdependency between heterogeneous settlements on the other, contribute to developing the 'achieved culture' as opposed to the 'aboriginal culture'. However, it seems that they use these dresses as their own by modifying the traditional form of customs with some modern product which is the reason behind its fancy and unique look. So far as their traditional dress is concerned, a 50 year old activist of Myagdi district said that there is no trend to handover their own skill. Therefore, self made dresses are going to disappear due to two reasons: first, the modern generation has no idea how to make their traditional clothes, and second, the production is costly and it does not look fancy. However, ethnic activists and leaders mobilise the concerning ethnicity for seeking greater ethnic values with interpretation under the favourable ethnic and political atmosphere. Therefore, Magars are not only traditionalists, they are also flexible and fluid as per the demand of modern way of life.

The ethnic culture among the various ethnic groups of Nepal looks similar in terms of consuming meat, and drinking alcohol. Hence, some activists think that without these habits, no one is a Magar. On the other side, some believe that such habits inhibit their progress. Therefore, in urban hubs they are trying to leave such tradition particularly in their death rituals. Magars from the south such as Thapa, Rana, and Aale use black hog, whereas the Magars from the north and west areas such as Pun, Rokka, Bhudha and others like buffalo and cow/ox respectively. In Pokhara, the Magars from both south and north think themselves to be superior to each other. Due to unfair contest for leadership and for holding the power in the Magar organisation, there is dispute between and among the Pun, Thapa and Rana activists. Ultimately, it compelled them to make two separate organisations, PS (Pun Society) and NMA (Nepal Magar Association), for organising themselves respectively. Along with this fact the lifestyle and culture also determine the superiority of one wing over the other¹⁸. This explains the contested leaderships in NMA and PS through which they are putting forward their programmes independently among their members. Therefore, it has been nearly two decades that their activism have been conducted separately with different sign and trademarks. In this regard, for few years PS has been trying to get recognition, where as the separate ethnic and indigenous group of Nepal.

¹⁸ About the Magars and their organisations in Pokhara and Kaski, see, Uma Nath Baral, *Ethnic Activism in Nepal: An Account of the Magar organizations in Kaski, Contribution to the Nepalese Study*, Vol. 36, 2008.

3.4 Differences between the Magars

As the researcher has mentioned in the earlier chapter, there are seven major clans and around a thousand sub-clans and subtitles among the Magars. It is interesting that the clans such as Pun, Rokka, Bhudha and Gharti are found among the northern Magars, whereas, Thapa, Rana and Ale have dominated the southern Magars. The districts Myagdi and Palpa are in opposite direction as they represent northern and southern Magars respectively. Although some settlements are found in heterogeneous form of these major clans, whether it is southern or northern, the Puns are significantly found in Myagdi while Thapa and Rana are found in Palpa district. However, all Magar clans have some sorts of similar culture and ritual in constructing their primordial identity. Magars from both regions—south and north—are similar in their use of *kutumba*,¹⁹ worship of ancestors and forefathers, religious practices that include shamanism and animism, and their dress up and their food habits. Furthermore, Magars from both regions prefer to marry a *mamako chhori* (maternal uncle's daughter). Gurungs and Thakuris (high-ranked Chhetris) also practice this kind of marriage. Likewise, both Magar groups are more or less Hinduised in their religious and ritual life. Even such types of similarities are found among the Magars in the west as proper Athar Magarant region (see in detail, Thapa, et. al. 2063 VS). However, some significant differences can be observed among the Magar activists in and around Pokhara-Kaski, especially between the Thapa-Rana-Ale Magars, on one side, and the Pun Magars on the other. But beside Pokhara, the Pun Magars from other various traditional places of Kaski district do not consider themselves different in culture and lifestyle from other Magar clans (such as Thapa, Rana, and Ale) and allow intra-caste marriage with them. The same attitudes are also found in Palpa, and the western and northern parts of the Myagdi districts. But the Pun activists that are associated with PS in Pokhara perceive that they have the significant religious and cultural differences than Thapa, Rana, and Ale clans.

Many Magars have migrated to Pokhara from the surrounding districts Syangja, Tanahun, Gorkha, Parbat, Myagdi, Baglung, and Palpa. Thapa, Rana, and Ale are the southern Magars who are the migrants from Syangja, Tanahun, Gorkha and Palpa, whereas Puns are the northern Magars who have migrated from Myagdi, Parbat and Baglung districts. In addition to large-scale Pun migration, a few Roka, Budha, and Gharti Magars from this region have also migrated to Pokhara. As the Pun activists claim themselves, Pun can be divided into two major clans, the 'Pure Puns' and the 'Other Puns'. 'Pure Puns' have four divisions: *dudh*, *sut*, *than*, and *pahare*. Besides these, there are nearly one hundred other sub-clans among the 'Other Puns'. Many 'Other Pun' sub-clans, such as *tilija*, *paija*, *garbuja*, *purja*, *khoriya*, *armaja*,

¹⁹ In general, *kutumba* means relatives, although it has a more precise meaning in Nepal. It indicates sisters' and daughters' husbands and their sons, who play prominent roles in ritual and religious activities.

etc. used the surname 'Pun,' rather than clan names, when recruited to the army in the past (Baral 2005/2062VS). Today many Magars add their clan or sub-clan's titles to surnames and some like to use Magar with their surnames. Puns who have migrated from Baglung, Parbat and Myagdi claim that they belong to Athara Magarant region. Although, almost all Pun Magars from these regions, and particularly from Myagdi (those are the major group in Pokhara), claim that their origin is in the Athara Magarant. Kesharjang Baral Magar as the expert of Magar language said in his interview with the researcher that 'most places and clan names that they use are in fact closer to 'Magar Dhut', the language of Barha Magarant'. Hence, there were many Magar regimes in the small states in the part that were "ruled by the Thapa (*Ramjali*) Magar before the migration of Khas (Malla) ruler from the west" (Baniya 2004: 4-6). However, among the Magars of the Myagdi district, particularly Puns and other Puns have settled nearby the Kali River in the south and east of the district, whereas other clans like Rokka, Budha, Thapa, and some Puns have settled in the periphery of the Myagdi River in the west and north of the district. Even they have some similar cultural practices in between the Magars from the Kali River and the Myagdi River. Hence, the Pun Magars from the periphery of the Kali River, who have a significant settlement in Pokhara city, also have some religious and rituals differences from one village to other.

Although it is very difficult to draw a demarcation between Puns and Thapa-Rana due to modern lifestyle and overlapping cultures in urban areas, general differences, as represented by Magar activists in Pokhara, can be summarised in a set of characteristics.

Table No. 3.3

Some opposing characteristics of northern and southern Magars in Pokhara, as related by the activists of NMA vs PS

S.No.	Thapa, Rana, and Ale	Pun
1.	Speaker of Magar language (Magar Dhut)	Do not speak Magar language
2.	Settled in lower hills (<i>Kachhade</i> Magar)	Settled in upper hills (<i>Lekali</i> Magar)
3.	Migrated from south	Migrated from north
4.	Pig eater and use pig/chicken for worshipping	Buffalo eater and use male goat/sheep for worshipping
5.	Farming as traditional occupation	Shepherds and mine as traditional occupation
6.	Use Kutumba, Bhusal, and Brahmin Priest	Use Brahmin priest and Kutumba.
7.	Prefer to 5 or 7 days death ritual	Prefer to 13 days death ritual
8.	Faith in Baje-Bajai and Mandali as an ancestors deities	Faith in Karapakeli-Phimala as an ancestor deities
9.	Traditional organisation 'Bheja' and Guthi	No such traditional organisation
10.	Ghatu, Kaura, and Sorathi as cultural dance	Saraswati Khayali, Maruni as cultural dance
11.	Make 'Bara'* in ritual ceremony	Make Sel Roti in such ritual
12.	Younger generation affiliated with NMSA	Younger generation active through PYS
13.	Longer tradition of State and army service	Much tradition to join the British army
14.	Affiliated with Gumasta Im** and NMA	Affiliated more with Pun Samaj

Source: Filed study 2005 to 2007, also see Baral 2008, 2062VS

(**Bara*: a kind of bread made from black gram and beans, which is very essential for their ritual ceremonies and festivals. **Gumasta Im: In Pokhara (Ram bazaar) Magar activists from Thapa-Rana-Ale clans started their earlier activism through *Gumasta* for cooperation and unity among Magars which was the first grassroots ethnic organisation of the city. '*Gumasta Im*' is a Magar term which means 'gathering house'.)

During his observations of two villages in Histan and Baranja of Myagdi district, the researcher found different cultural and ritual practices between the Pun communities and those of the Thapa, Rana and Ale Magar residents in the south. For instance, in Pokhara death rituals last thirteen days and the Puns in Histan spend three to five days. They also often use Jhankri (Shamanic) and Kutumba rather than Hindu priests and procedures. In comparison to Histan, Nagi, Chimkhola, and Patlikhet as the homogeneous settlements of the Magar, the Magars in Shikha, Ghara and Dana are more Hinduised. The activists from these villages have the dominated role in PS of Kaski. Through his observation the researcher

found that they are more Hinduised because of interaction with the high hill Hindu people. It is also said that a Pun from the region had a high level post in the Nepal army; so his role was decisive in disseminating the Hindu value among the Magars. Besides these, the conflict between two Magar groups also manifests the role it played for sanskritisation. Puns adopted the Hindu religion in their day to day life to make themselves different and higher than other Magars. Likewise, if we look at micro level, then we can see several differences among their cultural and ritual practices from one village to another and one clan to another. For instance, there are some similarities found in customary practices regarding their ritual and culture among the Magars in Baranja, but some sort of differences are found between earlier Magar settlers and late Magar settlers. Magars from Thapa, Rana and Ale clans in the south (Pipaldanda of the Palpa district) practice thirteen-day death rituals administered by Brahman priest, and they do not sacrifice animals for three to five days. Likewise, the rituals of Magars in west Palpa, such as Somadi, are much similar to the Hindu rituals. Among the villages in Kaski, Magars from different clans have the same religious practices that are carried out by the people on the basis of Hindu philosophy. Moreover, those Magar activists, who were affiliated with the NMA preliminary committee of Rambazaar, maintained in the group discussion that they are, just like Hindu Brahmins, giving up a system of sacrificing animal in death ritual.

During the field study in Palpa, Kaski and Myagdi, the researcher did not find the traditional of keeping black hog among the Pun Magars, while it is more common among the Thapa and Rana clans. A senior Pun activist stated in his interview that there is no tradition of keeping a black hog and most of the Pun Magars do not touch it because it is supposed to be religiously polluted. He further said that due to modern way of life the new generation does not care such traditional practice. In Pokhara some Pun activists have completely tried to adopt the Hindu religion in their day to day life in order to keep their status higher than the Thapa-Rana Magars. But the Pun Magars, who have been affiliated with NMA, seem much more similar with the other Magars in their organisational policies. Not only in cross-clan culture, even within the same clan, Magars' cultural and religious practices vary from one place to another. Therefore, it seems that the cultural values of the Magars have been established after the legacy of their ancestors along with distinct ecological atmospheres in due process of civilisation.

3.5 Conclusion

The above mentioned discussion shows that though some different ethnic characters are found in between the Magars, as a one ethnic group it can be differenced from other castes and ethnic groups of Nepal. They have their own ethnic languages such as Dhut, Kham and Kaike. Along with speaking their mother tongue in addition to

Nepali, Magars also have their own distinct traditional customs that differ from those of ruling so called 'high caste' groups in the hills. They espouse cultural practices like animism-shamanism which is supposed to have been practiced since ancient time and is distinct from the Hindu culture of the dominant group. Magars have a distinct social structure that does not fall under the hierarchical division of Varna or caste system, but have an egalitarian horizontal relation between and among ethnic groups. They have different written or oral histories that trace their line of descent back to the occupants of their territories predating their annexation into present-day Nepal. It seems that they have their own distinct ethnic characteristics although there are some sort of Hindu influences through the ruling elites. However, the Magars possess all ethnic characters and thus deserve an indigenous nationality. Hence they are rightly included in the list of adivasis/janajatis published by the government of Nepal.

Magar itself is a diverse community with regard to language, culture, clan and religion. So far as ethnic identity is concerned; Magars have more or less common ties of primordial bound of considerations towards racial values and homogeneity. From a primordial perspective, the Magars throughout the country have similar types of cultural, religious, and ancestral ties, whilst from an instrumental perspective they are heterogeneous groups with a fluid and unorthodox ethnic boundary with a common feeling of exclusion and marginalisation in the polity of the state. Hence, the activists are striving for the revitalisation of the ethnic identity of the Magars. The advocacy of ethnic activism in terms of language, culture and religion has been seen as the primordial type of consideration. However, each ethnic group such as Magar has its distinct ethnic features that could be defined and constructed on the basis of their population, land, language, religion, clans and culture.

CHAPTER IV

INTERFACE BETWEEN MAGAR ETHNICITY AND NEPALI STATE FROM ASSIMILATION TO DIFFERENTIATION

The Magar chiefdom was replaced by invaders, Khas Chhetri in around 12th century and by Rajput in around 15th century. However, the Magars had retained their influence in power structure of the country through various means of assimilation, i.e. keeping marital relations with new Rajput rulers, involving them in the foundation of Gorkha principality and unification of the country as Bhardars and warriors, by converting into Hinduism (religion of the rulers), adopting the Nepali language (language of dominant castes). By mid 19th century, since the establishment of the Rana rule, Magars had been kept out of courtyard and as a consequence of aggressive assimilation process exerted by the state; the Magars had gradually eroded their original culture, religion and language.

4.1 Assimilation into power

4.1.1 By Blood Connection

The ancestors of Shah Dynasty, who migrated from northern India, had first been to Palpa. Migrated Rajputs absorbed the local Magar culture and they maintained their relationship with local Magar women. During the settlement of Rajput in Magarant, they established their blood ties with the native Magars and their generations became the Shah rulers who ruled over the Baise territories known as Gandaki region where, almost all the Magars were settled (Hamilton, 1971; Whelpton, 1997; Subedi 2060VS; Budha Magar 2054). Jain Khan, the grand son of Bhupal Ranaji Rao who was supposed to be the first migrant in the Magar territory, became the King of Lasargha of Magarant after getting married with the Magar girl (Locomett, 2004). The descendants from Rajput and local Magar women had disseminated in the west hills into two ways. Those who migrated in the north were called Khan. Kulamandan Khan who one of them established the Kaski state. History shows that Kaski was ruled by Kulmandan Khan who was from the Magarant region at first. The emperor of Delhi was pleased with the gifts presented by the king of Kaski. As a result he gave the title of 'Shaha' to the king (Subedi, 2048). Thereafter, he and his generations came to be known as the kingship of Shah instead of the Khan and started to rule over the Lamjung state and then the Gorkha state. Kaski along with Lamjung, Tanahun, Gorkha and other small states were under the rule of Shaha dynasty (Baral Magar, 2050; Budha Magar, 2053; Hamilton, 1971). On the other hand, those who lived in the local villages of Palpa were known as Sen. Sen

King, Mukunda Sen, had established the Palpa principality. Then his generation founded the Tanahun and Bijayapur principalities. As a strong among the Baise states, Palpa was united with main territory of Nepal in very late (Kasajoo, 2001).

Prithvi Narayan Shah, who belonged to the Shah dynasty, and laid down the foundation of the modern Nepal in the early 19th century, had been connected in various ways with the Magar blood. His first wife was a daughter of Magar, the king of Makwanpur, and his mother was also a daughter of Magar, the King of Tanahun. His father belonged to the Shah dynasty, a hybrid of Rajput and Magar bloods. Apart from this, Magars were famous for their bravery and were considered warriors. Consequently, they were adopted as one of the ruling power elites during the Shaha era (1768-1846). Besides, the common practice of marriage with material daughter is extensively found in Shah and Magar families which also reveal their blood connection. Likewise, there is a tradition to keep the Magar priest in the major temples of the Shah dynasty. For instance, Alam Devi of Syanja, Manakamana of Gorkha, Kali Devi of almost all Shah's palaces throughout the country, and their ancestor's gods and goddess have the Magar Priests (Baral, 2062). Such practices suggest the existence of some sort of relation between religion and kinship. Ruling over these (Magar) territories and pleasing the Magar elites and offering them high rank in the army, King Prithvi Narayan Shah claimed to be the "King of Magarant" (Budha Magar 2054VS : 85, Pradhan, 1991). So, 'some of Prithvi Narayan's contemporaries regarded him as a Magar' (Whelpton 1997 : 73). However, the discussion presented in this section is very close to the statement that, the Shah dynasty and the Magar have the kinship relation.

4.1.2 By Involvement in the Foundation of Gorkha and Unification of Nepal

Most of the Magar activists suppose that many famous army chiefs like Amar sing Thapa, Bhakti Thapa, Biraj Thapa were from the Magar ethnic groups, and contributed to the foundation of the modern Nepal through the war of unification. Along with affiliation with state since pre and post unification, Magars gradually lost their own culture and ruling power over the Magarant. Before unification, some Magars had a significant role in the state army of the Kaski, Lamjung, Palpa, Tanahun and Gorkha. They played a decisive role in the state affairs, particularly in Gorkha. Therefore, Riccardi has mentioned that "Magar was one among the six ruling houses in Gorkha before 'unification' which lost their prerogatives in the course of the consolidation period" (cited in Pfaff-Czarnecka 1997 : 430). Magars played a significant role not only in the establishment of the Shah dynasty in the state of

Gorkha, but also in the unification of Nepal. During the unification period, Magars, particularly from the *Barha Magarant* region, had contributed significantly to the nation-building process through their participation in regiments, especially in *purano gorakh gan*. Thus, some Magars have a much longer tradition of state and army service and consequently a few of their elites were close to the King and state authority. Furthermore, various clans and sub-clans, much influenced by Hinduism in their religious and cultural practices in one hand and their blood relation with Shaha dynasty (king), on the other put Magars in the corridor of state power.

During unification the *Kipat* lands were confiscated and distributed largely to the Thakuri, Chhetri, Brahmin and some other warriors i.e. Gurung and Magar in the name of *Birta* and *Jagir* from the state side²⁰. Since the rule of Prithvi Narayan Shaha and his elites from *chha thar ghar*, including Magar, they (Magars) are one among others who dominated over power and resources of the state (Pradhan, 1991).

The period of 1768 to 1951 was the era of consolidating the Nepali state building, in which not only Brahmin and Chhetri but also Magar and Gurung along with other ethnic groups had especially contributed to the territorial unification of Nepali state. It is said that there were the regiments based on ethnic group, like, *Kala paltan*, *Gora Paltan* etc. who were from Magar ethnic communities²¹, which was later known as 'Purano Goraka Gan' regarded as the special Magar regiment.

Magar from *Barha Magrant* region had some sort of relationship with the unified Nepali state because they had played dominant roles in the state army and polity. But, Magars lost their position from the very beginning of the Rana regime in 1846 due to the discrimination policy under the Hindu values in favour of the Khas and Thakuri, particularly Rana elites. The process of Hinduisation and *Nepalisation*, in line with the ruler's religion and language, had gradually and negatively affected the distinct life styles and native languages of various ethnic groups including Magar.

²⁰ During the unification period among the *Thar-Ghar* (which had the ruling power as the subordinate body of the king Prithvi Narayan Shaha), Magars also were included significantly. Likewise, Magar and Gurung participated in the *Jangi pad* (post of the army), some of them were given sacred thread (Gurung 2004/2005: 433; Pignede, 1966).

²¹ Interview with Budha Magar in 2063/8/12.

4.1.3 By Adopting the Ruling Caste's Language and Religion

Magars' adoption of the ruling culture and language by force or by willingness dates back to 12th century. In around 12 century, the Khas Malla ruler occupied the ruling power in western hills and established the Malla kingdom which was strong and famous as Parbat state among the Baise states. The whole territories of Myagdi and Kali River of the north were under the Parbat state. At that time Magars were not allowed to speak their mother tongue because the Malla King was Khas and he did not know Magar language. Therefore, he restricted the Magar people from speaking their mother tongue. If they spoke, as claimed by the Magar activists, they would be punished. Magar did not have any money to pay punishment when there was a breach of rule by them. Therefore, they had given up speaking their own mother tongue. From generation to generation they did not speak their mother tongue, therefore they completely forgot it²².

Magar territory, particularly the Barha Magarant region had been ruled by the Hindu rulers. Since the establishment of modern Nepal, particularly beginning with the Rana regime the state had been favouring the Hindu religion. The Rana regime had imposed the *Sanskritization* and *Hinduization* process through state laws like the *Muluki Ain* (Law Code) of 1854. The state had attempted to develop a homogeneous culture to promote social integration within a frame of Hindu political ideals without considering the diversity and heterogeneous nature of Nepali society.

Assimilation of native people of Magarat into the Hindu culture roots back to medieval period and it was synchronized with similar designs in other parts of Nepal. The ancient history shows that the King Supushpa Varma (210-194 BC) divided Nepali society into Hindu caste (*Varna*) system for the first time in the Lichchawi period. Then after the medieval age, Jayasthiti Malla (1360-95) again divided society into four major divisions (*Varna*) and many other sub divisions, which is now called the caste system. He divided Newars into various strata according to the dress, ornament, occupations and life styles. By the time, the King of Gorkha called Ram Shaha (1606-36) also managed the society through various rules and regulations in accordance with the Hindu Varna and caste system in territories dominated by the Magar and Gurung ethnic population. Hinduism as the state religion of the Khas ruler of the Gorkha state was spread throughout the Nepali state since the unification

²² Almost all activists of the NMA in Myagdi said through interviews that they lost their mother tongue due to the suppression of the Malla Khas king, who did not allow their ancestors to use their Magar tongue. If they did, then they would have to pay a fine of 4 paisa. They did not have the money to pay the fines.

initiated in 1768. Many ethnic groups, particularly Magar and Gurung who had contributed to the unification process of Nepal, followed Hindu religion due to it being the state religion and also due to a factor that most of their officers were Chhetri who absolutely followed the Hindu religion.

Nepali society had been divided in accordance with the Hindu order as four Varna and sixty-six castes through vertical hierarchy. Many ethnic groups, particularly Magar and Gurung, became Hindu due to the influence of state. The process of Hinduisation had been rapidly and rigidly imposed since the Rana began to rule over the country in 1846. The first Rana Prime Minister, Janga Bahadur Rana, classified the Nepali society into on the basis of a vertical structure of a hierarchy of caste system. by implementing a civil code in 1854. This is regarded as the first body of state laws in Nepal. The code classified the Nepali people into three broad categories: first, *Tagadhari* at the top (the sacred-thread wearing people, like Brahmin, Thakuri, Chhetri), second, *Matwali* in the middle (an alcohol drinking, like Magar and other ethnic groups), and third, *Sudra* as the low caste which was also divided into sub groups as *Choichito Halnu Naparne* (impure or touchable like Kasai as the low caste Newar) and *Choichito Halnu Parne – Achhut* (impure and untouchable like almost the Dalits groups). Assimilation into the religious principle of the ruling caste was a strategy for national integration. Shah rulers, therefore, deliberately encouraged Magars to become Hindus.

The clan of Rana and Thapa Magars are largely found in the central hills of Nepal and some of them are even serving as priests in the Hindu temples and ancestor deities of Shah rulers. It is also said that ‘pragmatic strategy’ of Shaha rulers for ‘incorporation of subject population into the state religion, particularly those who, like the Magar, were numerous and were important to establish as allies within the new Hindu state’ (Lecomte-Tilouine, 2000 : 38). Some even claimed that “the family of Gorkha which now governs Nepal, although it pretends to come from Chitaur (India) ...is in reality, of the Magar tribe” (Hamilton, 1971 : 26). There is an interesting history with regards to a Shah ruler and a Magar priest, a famous holy person. Lakhan Thapa Magar (I) was a spiritual advisor to King Ram Shah in the 17 century, and it is suggested that he was a devotee of goddess and had a very close relationship with his queen. She was considered to be an incarnation of the Goddess. When the King discovered her real nature of being goddess, she abandoned her human form. At that time divine power told Lakhan Thapa that she would be reborn as Manakamana (goddess of wishes) in the form of stone in his field. Lakhan Thapa found the stone and started to worship and his generation adopted her as an ancestor goddess. However, the role of Lakhan

Thapa and the concerted effort made by him are “strong clues of the importance of the Magar in the religion of the kingdom of Gorkha, which lies in turn at the basis of the state religion of present-day Nepal” (Lecomte-Tilouine, 2000 : 14).

The rulers, particularly Ranas, imposed the Hindu religion upon Magar and other ethnic population through their state order (*lalmohar*). They would give the opportunity of paying no land tax for the Gurungs “if they adopted the Brahmin and Hindu religion instead of the Monks and Buddhism” (Pignede, 1966 : 491). Hence, the Hinduisation process had also been conducted by the traditional Hindu ruler in the armies which were dominated by the Magar, Gurung and Rai-Limbu through the management of the Hindu priest. The Hindu religion and culture performed in such institution has influential and decisive role in disseminating the Hindu values among those ethnic groups (Pignede, 1966; Cross, 1986)²³.

Gradually, Hinduism affected the day to day life of Magars and other ethnic people who had their own distinct culture. For instance, the death rituals, and many other religious and cultural performances of Magar ethnic groups were based more or less on Hindu values. Likewise, in the traditional Magar villages of the southern Kali River, the aboriginal culture has been largely found in their culture and even today they perform *Kaura* and *Thulo Nach* which is supposed to be their own distinct culture. But the contents of these songs are derived from Hindu mythology and love story of the king and queen of Baise era. Most of the Magar activists think that the contents of the songs were changed when the Hindu rulers confiscated the ruling power of the Magar over their own Magarant territories.

4.1.4 Price of Assimilation into the Dominant Culture

The era from 1768 to 1990 is the history of destroying ethnic cultural identity through Hindu cultural assimilation. The Hindu religion and culture was adopted in central Nepal by the ruling elites who had a dominant role throughout the country in the process of Nepali state building along with the deterioration and invasion over the different tribal and ethnic aboriginal cultures. Therefore, Hachhethu states that “...the overall effect of the national integration policy was that the Hill high caste Brahmins and Chhetri became the dominated and privileged groups while the other groups- the Janajatis, Madheshis and Dalits - ended up as the marginalized groups (2008 : 73):”

²³ Krishna Bahadur Gurung an advisor to the Tamu Dhi-Kaski, said to researcher that he has one of they documents which shows a Gurung officer (Nathu Praladh in the Nepal Army) in 1913VS, was asked to follow the Hindu religion by him and his generations.

Following sections deal with how ethnic groups in general and Magar in particular have been affected by the result of assimilation process. The ethnic and indigenous groups have broadly been divided into three different groups on the ground of several factors like adaptive strategies and accessibility to state resources; disadvantaged status; historical experience of disintegration, displacement and decimation; accessibility to power structure; accessibility to social prestige; and level of human development, etc (IIDS., 2002 : 76-7). Among the 59 total indigenous/ nationalists, two ethnic groups viz. Newar and Thakali are the advanced and privileged groups whereas the ten indigenous/nationalities such as Bankariya, Kushunda, Kushblia, Raute, Surel, Hayu, Raji, Kisan, Lepcha, and the Meche are endangered. The remaining 47 ethnic groups including Chepang, Tamang, Tharu, Gurung, Magar and others are the unprivileged, marginalised and disadvantaged indigenous/ nationalities.

4.2 Human Development Index

If we go through the ethnicity and the modern values of development in democracy, the condition of ethnic groups including the Magars are better than the Dalits. But they are marginalised and disadvantaged in comparisons to Brahmin, Chhetri, Newar and Thakali who get significant position in every walk of life under modernisation. From educational perspective, Magars are worse off compared to other ethnic group. This ethnic group has only one percent with certificate level education which is less than 3.5 percent of the national average (Gurung, 2001). Similarly, in other highly educated field such as the MBBS and other technical fields, this ethnicity has very nominal manpower in comparison to Brahmin, Chhetri and Newar. A report (IIDS, 2002) also shows that there are only 4.54 percent indigenous/nationalities that are enrolled in different disciplines in engineering (1989-2001) while the high caste people from Brahmin, Chhetri and Marwadi, and Newar ethnic group have 60.61 and 32.47 percent respectively. Only 0.62 percent Magars have upper technical education out of the total enrolment of 4.54 percent within the ethnic groups. They also had very few foreign scholarships for higher education in the technical sector. Over a period of two decades (1981-2001) Brahmin/Chhetri/Thakuri and Newar occupied 63.9 and 31.5 percent seat respectively. So far, Magars had only 0.3 percent of the total seats. Similar data are also recorded in the field of medical science (Maharajgunj). The scholarships provided by Tribhuvan University in different levels and subjects for higher education in 1986-2001 were in favour of Brahmin, Newar, and Chhetri as they occupied 49.26, 33.08, and 11.03 percent respectively. Likewise, Tarai caste got 5.15 percent; Rai and Thakali each possessed 0.74 percent; whereas Magar and other ethnic groups did not receive such opportunities (see in detail, IIDS., 2002 : 66-71). One of the Magar publications shows that only 2.16 percent Magars have the Bachelor and above degree and only 1.61 percent Magar hold the high level post of the decision making body (NDMA, 2063).

According to a latest report of HDR (2009), female has 54.5% and male has 81.0% average literacy rate, while, in secondary and higher level of education female and male have 29.3 and 53.5 rate respectively. The literacy rate of Hill Janajatis including Magar, is closer to the national average although they are far behind Newar, Brahmin and Chhetri people. So far as the secondary and higher level of education is concerned, janajatis are not only back-ward than the Newar, Brahmin and Chhetri groups, they are also below the national average. Likewise, the people of three caste and ethnic groups-Madhesi Brahmin and Chhetri, Newar and Hill Brahmin have a higher HDI value (0.6 and above)- than that of Dalits and Janajatis, both from the Hill and the Tarai. Of the three components of HDI, education is the most significant driver. This accounts for the wide gap between the Brahmin/Chhetri and other group of people. Besides Dalits and Muslims, the janajatis including Magars have 0.507 of HDI which is lower than that of Brahmin/Chhetri from Tarai and Hill as well as Newar whose score is 0.552 and 0.616 respectively (HDR, 2009).

In addition to lesser involvements in highly educational and technical expertise sectors, most of the Magars are engaged in agricultural pastoral life, although some of them have been recruiting in the foreign and domestic security forces since the unification period. Normally, the trends of involvement in industries are not found among this ethnicity unlike other ethnic groups such as Newar, Thakali, Sherpa. The Human Development Report (1998) has shown that the economic standard of Newar, Brahmin, Muslim, Yadav, Gurung, Tharu, Chhetri, Rai and Magar represent the first, second, third, fourth, fifth, six, seven, eight and ninth in order respectively. Likewise, Magar is also found below the poverty line. Besides, Dalits and Limbu have high poverty rate more than 65 percent while Newar has only 25 percent, Brahmin 34 percent, Gurung 45 percent, and Tharu 48 percent. Magars group has also high rate of poverty i.e. 58 percent under the poverty line. In terms of per capita income, Newars have the highest as i.e. Rs. 11,953 followed by Brahmin 9,921 and Chhetri 7,744 but, the Magar, Gurung, Sherpa, Rai and Limbu have only 6,607 that is less than Tharu, Yadav, Rajbansi and Ahir who have 6,911 though this figure is also less than national average (i.e. Rs. 76, 73) per capita income per year respectively. Likewise, Newars are placed into 140.73, Brahmin 135.87, Chhetri 107.31, while Magars including Gurung, Sherpa, Rai and Limbu are placed only at 92.21 positions in the national human development indicators. That is below the Rajbansi, Ahir, Yadav and Tharu who also shared 96.28 positions in the national indicators (NESAC, 1998).

Likewise, the HDR of 2009 also shows similar trend as recorded in the previous years. Compared to Brahmin, Newar and Chhetri, Dalits and Janjatis including Magar also tend to lag behind in access to almost all available opportunities and resources. Accordingly, the average per-capita income of the Nepalese citizen is 15,000. Newar has 26,100; All Brahmins and Chhetris have 18,400 and all janajatis have only 13,300 per capita income. Among the

Hill janajatis, urban people have 26,448, per capita income, whereas, the rural janajatis have only 11,987. Although some Magars involved in high level Nepalese security personnel and ex-British Gurkha and settled in urban centres have good income, most of the Magars live in rural areas, and therefore, they have very low level income in comparison to the national average.

However, as mentioned above, all HDI data shows that besides the Dalits and Muslims, janajatis including Magars are behind Newar, Brahmin and Chhetri in every walk of human development. Their lower ranking in the human development index ultimately become a hindrance for their representation and participation in the power and resources of the state.

4.3 Representation of Magars in the Political parties

The composition of the political parties in its central structure does not reflect proper participation of these ethnic groups. A report prepared by 2002 presents that there were only 25.1 percent participation of 10 ethnic and indigenous groups in the political parties out of the 163 total central committee members from the four major parties: Nepali Congress, CPN (UML), NDP and Nepal Sadbhavana party (Goodwill party). Among them Magar 1, Tharu 5, Newar 10, Tamang 2, Rai 6, Gurung 5, Limbu 7, Rajbansi 3, Gangai 1 and Thakali 1. Although the Magars shared the first and third place out of the total ethnic groups and in the total caste and ethnic population of the country, there was no Magar representation in the main two political parties: NC and UML, it was only seen in NDP (IIDS, 2002 : 108-112).

In democracy, a fair representation of diverse ethnic groups in the state affairs will be possible when the political parties become inclusive in their structure. Unfortunately, our political parties do not seem serious in this regard. The social composition of the party structures is shown in the following table.

Table No. 4.1
Caste and Ethnic Composition in Central Level
Structure of Political Parties

Political Party/Caste-Ethnicity	NC	NCP-Maoist	NCP-UML	Total/Percent
Brahmin	26	15	38	79/48.46
Chhetri/Thakuri	12	7	8	27/16.56
Magar	-	4	-	4/2.45
Other Janajati	12	5	14	31/19.01
Tarai/Madheshi	11	1	4	16/9.81
Dalits	2	1	1	4/2.45
Muslim	2	-	-	2/1.22
Total	65	33	65	163/100.00

Source: Field Study-November, 2006

As show in Table no. 4.1, each party has shown symbolic space for Dalits. Besides this, the *janajatis* do no have a proper representation in the central structure of the political parties. Except the Magars, the *janajats* groups like Newar, Rai, Limbu, and Tamang have some representation in the central committee of each political party. The Magars, which is the major ethnic group with more than 7 percent of the total population have only 4 seats in the central committee of the CPN-Maoists where as they have no representation in NC, and UML.

Various studies show that people who are educated, economically better off, and dominant in the society normally participate in active politics. We can not ignore these facts in the Nepali context too. Brahmin and Chhetri followed by the Newar have almost these requisites; therefore, they have been playing dominating role in the Nepali political parties, including NC, UML, and Maoist parties. So far as the Magars' representation is concerned, it is found significantly in the central level of the Maoist party, but nil in other parties. Magars have been settling in the western hills, particularly in Kali Gandaki and Rapti-Bheri regions which are called Barha Magarant and Athar Magarant regions. . There has been a long tradition of the Magars of Barahamagarant giving service to the state by joining the army. During the unification, the Magars served the state. . Therefore, the people of this region have proximity with the state. On the contrary, the Athar Magarnt region is geographically isolated and it became part of the Nepali state two decades after the unification of Nepal. The Magars of this region did not have any remarkable role in the state. Moreover, the Magars were found to have marginalised in the state affairs. This region has been dominated

by the left politics, mainly Maoist ideology, and the Maoist war was initially launched from the base of the Kham territory and the Magars from Athar region (Anna de sales 2002). Likewise, the senior activist of this part said with the researcher that the he Magars of this region had greatly contributed to the Maoist's insurgency due the driving force of leftist ideology. Therefore, the Magars of this region have significant representation in the Maoist party compared to other parties to this day.

4.4 Role of Magars in the Parliament

In democracy, parliament is the supreme policy making body which is formed with the representation of the people. The parliament in Nepal was first established in 1959 in the aftermath of a revolution in 1951 for democracy in the political history of Nepal. Within one and half year, the parliament and the democratic system was dismissed and a party less Panchayat system was introduced that lasted for 30 more years. Democracy was re-established in 1990 and reinstated in 2006 through an April (2006) revolution.

In spite of the decade long parliamentary exercise, the participation of Magar, in both national and local politics was negligible. The Panchayat system was a party-less system which strictly prohibited the activities of political parties along with all political liberties. Individuals could participate in politics on personal basis. Panchayat had adopted a hierarchical system of village or town Panchayat at the local level and the National Panchayat as a legislative body at the central level. Before the referendum in 1980, the *Panchas*²⁴ who were already elected from the local level were eligible for the district, zonal to national legislative body. Although there was no party system in the Panchayat era there were two factions of the Panchs: government candidates and non-government candidates in each election for the National Panchayat. Parliament is a major representative governmental institution, which has decisive power in policy making. During the post 1990's democracy, there were two houses in the Nepali parliament: the Upper house named as the National Assembly which had nominal power whereas, the Lower House, called the House of Representatives (HoR) had a major role in state affairs. If we analyse the trends of participation in the HoR, it was dominated by the so-called high caste people in all the three general elections represented by the different political parties.

The representation from the *janajatis* was nominal in proportion to their strength of votes and population. The trends of the representation since the first parliament in 1959 to the last parliament (1999) shows that Brahmin, Chhetri and the Newar are the privileged groups.

²⁴ Panchas mean a person who was represented in the Panchayat governance at the local to national level. Without taking a membership of Panchyati organizations (Bargiya Sangathan), no one was allowed to participate in the election of Panchayat at different levels.

The following table depicts the caste and ethnic composition in the Nepali Parliament from 1959 to 2006.

Table No. 4.2

Caste and Ethnic composition in the Nepali Parliament, 1959-1999

Caste/Ethnicity	1959	1967	1978	1981	1986	1991	1994	1999	N A (1991- 2006)
Brahmin Num. Percent	30 27.5	30 24.0	27 21.3	14 12.5	23 20.5	77 37.6	86 41.9	77 37.6	66 40.9
Chhetri Num. Percent	35 32.1	47 37.6	46 36.2	41 36.6	43 38.4	39 19.0	40 19.5	44 21.5	26 16.4
Magar Num. Percent	2 1.8	2 1.6	1 0.8	4 3.6	5 4.5	3 1.5	4 1.9	5 2.4	3 1.8
Janajati Num. Percent	22 20.2	34 27.2	37 29.1	41 36.6	31 27.6	59 28.8	47 22.9	44 21.5	37 23.0
Madhesi Num. Percent	18 16.5	11 8.8	14 11.0	10 8.9	10 8.9	21 10.2	24 11.7	27 13.2	20 12.4
Muslim Num. Percent	2 1.8	0 0	1 0.8	2 1.8	0 0	5 2.8	4 1.9	2 0.9	1 0.6
Dalits Num. Percent	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	8 4.9
Total Number Percent	109 100	125 100	127 100	112 100	112 100	205 100	205 100	205 100	161 100

Source: Constructing the table on the basis of the List of the MPs, provided by the Parliamentary Secretariat, Kathmandu/ 2063/6/7 (N A – National Assembly)

Table no. 4.2 shows that the Brahmin had a significant position in the democratic parliament of 1991, 1994 and 1999, whereas the Chhetris were more privileged in the Panchayat election from 1967 to 1986. Besides the result of the first parliament, Chhetris emerged as the major dominant group in the election during monarchy than the elections under

democratic system. Most of the election results show that *Janajatis* in total have very low representation in comparison to Chhetri, Brahmin and the Newar. Moreover, among the *janajatis*, the Magar had very nominal representation in the legislative body in comparison to other ethnic groups like Newar, Gurung, Rai, Limbu and Tharu in the parliamentary elections before 1986 (see Appendix – 3). According to the table no. 4.2, there was only 1.8 percent MPs from the Magar population out of 109 of the total MPs in the first democratic parliament of 1959. During the Panchayat era (1960-1990), in the legislative body Rastriya Panchayat, the Magar representation was 2.9 percent out of 511 of the total MPs (including elected and nominated members) from the National Panchayat of 2019 VS to 2043 VS (Baral, 2063). As per the above table, even their representation was 1.5%, 1.9%, and 2.4% in the House of Representatives which was formed in 1991, 1994, and 1999's general elections respectively during the post 1990 democratic period. Likewise, the above table shows that there were 161, the total MPs in the National Assembly in between 1991 to 2006, in which the Brahmin shared 41 percent followed by the Chhetri and Newar by 16.4 and 13.0 percent respectively whereas, the *Janajatis* except the Newar, had only 11.8 percent out of which 1.8 percent was from the Magar side. The Interim Parliament formed after the April revolution following the Peace Accord between the state and the Maoist in November 2006 had 330 MPs in total. Out of this, 3 percent (11) MPs represented the Magar ethnic group. Among them, eight represented the Maoist political party alone (Baral, 2063). These data illustrate that this ethnic group had played a crucial role in the Maoist War (1996-2006) and has significantly contributed to the composition of the Maoist Militias.

4.5 Magars in the Executive and Other Constitutional Organs

In the political history of Nepal, the post of the prime minister as the executive head of the state has been almost occupied either by the Chhetri or Brahmin except one time at the end of the Panchayat system when the post was held by a Newar. If we analyse the cabinet composition formed since the democracy of 1951, very few Magars had the opportunities to be the ministers. It is an interesting thing that the Magars have received the post of minister only in Panchayat system or in democracy when the King was powerful. At the beginning of the Panchayat system, a Magar called Giri Prasad Budhathoko became a minister of defence. Bala Ram Gharti Magar was a lucky politician who had been minister several times with various cabinets either during Panchayat era or during democratic era. Likewise, Narayan Singh Pun and Gore Bahadur Khapangi became ministers in 2002 and in 2005 when the king was active and took full power of state respectively²⁵. Besides these examples, there were

²⁵ Narayan Singh Pun, a colonel of the Nepali Army, became a member of HoR from Myagdi district through the Nepali Congress in 1999; he became the chairman of the Nepal Samata Party that was established in his initiation after the NC splinted into two factions as NC (democratic) and NC. He became a Minister from the Samata party when the king became active in 2002. He was also active in conducting the talks with the Maoist. He has passed away some years ago. Likewise, Gore

assistant ministers (Magar) at the end of the Panchayat system from Kaski and in the government of the Nepali Congress (Democratic) from Rolpa, although they did not have any role in the cabinet. Unfortunately, there had not been any Magar in the Interim government which was established immediately after the April 2006 revolution. The representation of a Magar has been found in the cabinet formed in the aftermath of the CA (Constituent Assembly) election (April 2008).

In its 50 years' history of Judiciary, the two Magars had the opportunity to be judges for the first time in its current structure. Among 248 judges in the judiciary (District, Appellate and Supreme Court), only 2 judges (1 supreme and 1 district) are representing the Magar ethnic group (NLMA, 2064). The representation in various state organizations, since the post 1990 democracy, i.e. Attorney General, Public Service Commission, Election Commission and National Planning Commission, are principally occupied by either Brahmin/Chhetri or by Newar (See also Table 5.4). It seems that there is no representation from the Magar side, whereas even a few representatives are from Gurung, Rai and Madheshi population (IIDS 2002, Thapa 2006). However, most of the high level posts in the decision making bodies, including various constitutional organs, have been held by high caste Hill groups followed by Newar and Madhesi ethnic groups. The same trend has been continuing since 1990's democracy and also after the April revolution (2006). The following table displays the facts.

Bahadur Khapangi, a leftist background activist had become the chairman of the NMA in its central committee from 1991 to 2005. He also established a political party called Nepal Janamukti Party in 1994 in order to organize the *janajatis* for getting political representation through the proportional representation based on the population of each caste and ethnic groups. He received a minister post when he supported the king's step to hold the executive power in democracy. As an ethnic leader and his long experience in the politics, he became very popular among the ethnic activists particularly, among the Magars, therefore, once he claimed himself as the Nelson Mandela of Nepal as the great supreme ethnic leader due to populist sentiment. But he gradually began to loose his charismatic authority when he supported the assertive monarchy under democracy and became a minister under the active kingship. Unfortunately, he lost his position and prestige even among the Magars and their ethnic organizations after the success of *Janandolan* II as an antimonarchical movement in 2006.

Table No. 4.3

Ethnic Representation in the Constitutional Organs

Caste/Ethnicity	PSC (2008-2065VS)	ICAU (2034-2065VS)	Auditor General (2016-2065VS)	Attorney General (2009-2065VS)	Election Com. (2008-2065VS)	Total
	Chief/Member	Chief/Member			Chief/ Member	
Brahmin	2 7	3 12	4	6	3 5	42
Thakuri/Chhetri	5 7		4	4	5	30
Magar	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other Janajati	6 11	1 6	2	4	3 4	37
Madhesi/Tarai	3 9	1		2	2	17
Total	16 34	5 18	10	16	11 16	126

Source: Field Study, 2008 (Table is constructed through the name lists of the constitutional organs provided by respected office of the organs).

Besides the government, the constitutional organs have also a significant role in the decision making process of the state. As other mechanism of the state, ethnic groups have no significant representation in the constitutional organs. Table no. 4.3 shows the domination of Brahmin and Chhetri followed by Newar ethnicity in the constitutional organs since their establishment. Along with these groups, other ethnic groups have shared some representations in these bodies only after post the April 2006 revolution through inclusive democracy. Nevertheless, there is no representation from the Magar ethnic group although Gurung, Rai, Limbu, Tamang and Thakali have occupied some positions in these organs.

Bureaucracy in its high level is supposed to be the permanent institution of decision making for a country. A study states that there was no representation from the *janajatis* including Magar, Dalits and Muslim whereas, Brahmin and Chhetri occupied 31.25 percent, Newar 25 percent, and Tarai (Madhesi people) 9.37 percent respectively out of the total 32 secretary in the government high level bureaucracy in Panchayat period (Gurung, 1995 : 115). This trend seems to be continuing even in the democratic era (1990-till now). The following table represents the ethnic composition in high level bureaucracy that has the decisive role in decision making of the country.

Table No. 4.4
Ethnic Composition in High level Bureaucracy*
(Including first and special classes)

Caste / Ethnicity	Secretary	Joint Secretary	Total
Brahmin	32	88	120 / 75.0%
Chhetri	3	11	14 / 8.7%
Magars	-	-	-
Other Janajati	7	14	21 / 13.1%
Madhesi/Tarai	2	2	4 / 2.5%
Dalits		1	1 / 0.6%
Total	44	116	160

Table is constructed from the name lists of the joint secretary and secretary that were provided by the Ministry of General Administration in 2064/11/10. (*Not included Judiciary)

As per Table no. 4.4, Brahmin has a major role (75 %) in the high level bureaucracy followed by the Newar ethnic group (12%) and Chhetri (8.7 %) respectively. There is no representation from Magar ethnic side and no significant participation from total ethnic group, whereas only a few representations are found from Bhujel and Rai. It is suggested that the Magar and other ethnic groups have relatively more participation in the security forces than in bureaucracy though these institutions seem to be dominated more by the Chhetris.

4.6 Magars in Security Forces

Magars are significantly represented in the state army and police forces, but they occupy very few high posts in such forces. They are strong and brave in terms of fighting wars and they have been used for such purposes in the national or foreign regiments viz., British and India. Data reveal that they have no good education and orientation. Therefore, they have no opportunities to join the administrative and other bureaucratic posts. But Magars prefer to be recruited in the security forces in the country and abroad. The following tables show the present status of the *janajatis* in the security forces. Besides the Newars, almost all ethnic groups including the Magars have either very nominal or very few representation in the structure of the Nepali Army and the Police Force. Following table reveals their involvement in the police force.

Table No. 4.5**Caste and Ethnic composition in Police Force**

Caste/Ethnicity	IG	AIG	DIG	SSP	SP	DSP	Inspector	Total	Percent
Brahamin	-	-	1	7	34	60	196	298	32.18
Thakuri/Chhetri	1	1	7	16	27	75	308	435	46.97
Magar	-	-	2	3	3	3	12	23	2.48
Other Janajati			6	9	16	44	72	147	15.87
Madhesi/Tarai	-	-	-	-	1	4	10	15	1.62
Dalits	-	-	-	-	-	3	05	08	0.86
Total	1	1	16	35	81	189	603	926	100

Table is made in accordance with the name list of police officers (those who write their surname Magar).

Source: Field Study, November, 2006

Though the significant number was found in the post of Police chief from the Magar ethnicity in the past but at present it has not been found so far. According to Table no. 4.5 and 3.7 (Appendix 3) the Chhetri has the highest representation (46.9%) in the police force of the officer level followed by Brahmin and Newar as 32.1 percent and 11.1 percent respectively out of 926 police officers (above the post of police inspector). Although they have significant population in comparison to other ethnic groups, the Magar has more representation than other ethnic groups (similar to Gurung as 2.4 percent). But this group has occupied very low position in the officer ranks of the police force in comparison to Chhetri, Brahmin and Newar ethnic groups. Likewise, the following table highlights the role of Magar ethnicity in the present composition of the Nepalese Army.

Table No. 4.6**Caste and Ethnic Composition in Army personnel***

Caste/Ethnicity	Number	Percentage
Brahamin	73	16.08
Giri/Syanyasi	4	0.88
Thakuri/Chhetri	277	61.01
Magar	8	1.76
Janajati	82	18.06
Madhesi/Tarai	9	1.98
Dalits	1	0.22
Total	454	100

Source: Table has been constructed in accordance with the list of Army Officers (Field Study, November, 2006)

(*Included both non-technical and technical posts from Colonel to Chief of the Nepalese Army personnel)

As per Table no. 4.6, the Thakuri-Chhetris have the dominant role with 61.1 percent out of the total army officers. Dalits have just nominal representation and the janajatis (ethnic groups) have low representation in comparison to their strength of the population. In *janajatis*, Newar is privileged group with 8.1 representation followed by the Gurung with 5.5 percent representation in the army structure (see Appendix 3 , 3.8). The Magar has only 1.7 percent army officer out of the total 454 officers above the colonel post in the Nepali Army. The above table shows that besides the Newar and Gurung, the ethnic groups including Magars have very low representation in the army compared to their percent in the total population.

4.7 Judgment of Magar People to their Role in Polity

The above mentioned governmental data show that in comparison to Brahmin and Chhetri, Magar as an ethnic group is underprivileged and marginalised in the high level policy making state organs. Hence, compared to Newars and to some extent Gurungs ethnic groups, the Magars have very low participation in the political and constitutional institutions of the state despite being a major ethnic group. Thus, Magar ethnic group is excluded from the mainstream politics.

During the field work in the local Magar areas, the researcher put forth the query on why and how the Magars, the third largest populated group, has been marginalised in the polity. However, some of them have been close with the state and the rulers since the formation of the Nepali state. Almost all Magars responded that their role in the politics and state institutions is very low due to the excluding nature of the state. Some activists further said that since the formation of Nepali state, it has been dominated by the Hindu and high caste hill group elites. They further stated that some Magars have been getting opportunities to participate in the decision making process but they are not interested in sharing their ethnic identity. Moreover, due to Sanskritisation, some of them, particularly high level security personnel, have upgraded themselves in the Thakuri or Chhetri clans. Therefore, they discouraged the Magars' ethnic identity along with their language, religion and culture. Moreover, significant representations in the state affairs and ethnic identity can not be expected because they have been excluded and deprived from their inherent ethnic rights by the state since a long time. Some ethnic activists perceive that the political elite culture of the state which has been prioritised by the Hindu rulers since a long time is also the barrier for the Magars' participation in the state affairs. In this connection, some senior activists

said that Magars and other ethnic groups who are excluded and marginalised will be privileged only when the state treats them equally. Such expectation will come to function only when the state respects their identities and cultures and provides reasonable opportunity in the polity and in controlling over the resources in their historical territories²⁶.

On the other side, some activists at the local Magar villages believe that there are some other factors behind the low political participation of Magar ethnicity. The factors like education, political awareness and the economic status have crucial role in determining the level of participation in politics and state affairs. Dambar Purja and Mukti Rokka from Myagdi and Sher Bahadur Somai and Denesh Rana from Palpa said in their interviews that Magars are very backward in politics due to lack of educational and political knowledge in one side and poverty on the other. For political and social awareness, education is very essential but they do not continue their study for two reasons. First, they go to school only for acquiring certificate that is eligible for recruitment in the army of Nepal and abroad and for seeking job in Gulf countries. Second, most of the Magars' children do not want to study further because of poverty in most of the rural parts where they should assist their parents with their house hold jobs and some of them can not afford books and dress in the school²⁷.

During the survey of the Magars and interview with their activists, the researcher observed that although some Magar youths have focused their concentration on carrier and education, most of the Magars particularly in urban areas are more eager to go to foreign countries for earning more money. On the other side, by observing their day to day life and conducting discussion with them in rural Magar villages, the researcher came to know that regular alcohol drinking habit also affects their economic condition and political awareness. The activists in urban centers hesitate to admit that they are also backward due to such habits. But most of the activists in rural parts expressed that their nature of straight forward, habit of drinking more, not giving priority to the education, and their preferences to settle in cold places rather than urban centers caused their backwardness. According to them, if this process continues, no one can increase their political and social awareness. Hence, it is very difficult to be active in social and political activities and to think about their progress. A 55 years old activist of Somadi village said in his interview that his family was rich because his father and forefather had enough fertile land in low hill. His ancestors and himself have lost such good lands and have now settled in upper hills with less property due to their drinking habit and preference for cold place to live. He further stated that they are poor and go to other villages looking for labour work. In this context, it is difficult to expect them to be

²⁶ An Interview with senior Magar activists Suresh Ale, 2063/11/ and Lok Bahadur Thapa Magar, 2063/4/; both are advisor to MNLF.

²⁷ Interviews with Dammar Purja, 2063/2/12 and Mukti Rokka, 2063/6/10. Both are senior Magar activists in Myagdi.

involved in social and political activities because they are devoting most of their life in their struggle for survival²⁸.

The researcher would like to mention one of the similar experiences here. The chairman of NMA-Kaski, said that he had invited around one hundred Magar activists to attend the seminar that was organised as a part of this research study but only one third activists were present. Therefore, the chairman of NMA-Kaski said “if there is drink and dance programme, more and more people would come and like to drink and dance but when there is a programme like this which is for their ethno-social and political awareness, then nobody likes to come and share their ideas.” He further said, “That is why, we Magars are backward.” From these deliberations, the researcher concluded that education and political knowledge are the basic factors for their socio-political transformation. Then only they can adopt modern values of life which will help them to promote and increase their role in the society and politics. However, the young Magars and their family have considered the significance of education and its values in modern life. Both head masters, Pradeep Pun and Krishna Sapkota of two different High Schools in Histan and Baranja of Myagdi respectively said that the dropout rate of Magar students was found to be high in the past, but now they are sincere and serious about education leading to a decrease in the dropout rate.

It is an interesting experience that is revealed from the interview with Bom Kumari Budha Magar, the senior activist, who has been devoted most of her life in politics and in promotion of the Athara Magaranti identity and culture. She said through her interview that participation in active politics is possible for those activists who have relatively well economic status than the general public. She further justified that those who succeeded in politics have enough property and well connection with the family of the traditional ruling elites. In addition to this, she has given many examples such as Barman Budha, Barhsa Man Pun, Nanda Kishor Pun and she herself and other political leaders of the Athar Magarant region are from such traditional ruling families as *Jimwal* and *Mukhiya*. All these families have more property compared to commoners as well as dominant position at the local village. She gave her own example mentioning that her father was a Pancha and her family was rich and belonged to traditional ruling class, therefore, she knew politics by heredity. Because of the ruling tendency and the political knowledge, she was naturally inclined to it and she has been politically socialised by her family background. From this background she was able to acquire leadership qualities and mobilise the people in general, deliver political

²⁸ Researcher has found similar type of experiences while sharing through kuragraphy with the Magar activists in the rural parts of the Magar settlements in Palpa. Syam Bahadur Garamja and Padam Bahadur Budha from Bhorle, Manikala Raskoti, Tej Bahadur Raskoti, Sher Bahadur Somai and Ammar Dangal from Dhanharka, Kokal Dhara of Somadi VDC, interviews on 2063/6/20. Likewise, Dinesh Rana and other young boys from Pipal danda of Palpa; Nanda Rokka of Baranja and Mansara Pun, Pradip Pun and Yashodha Pun of Histan Myagdi, all expressed such views through their interview.

speeches, and also play political games. Therefore, Budha Magar concludes with her assertion that activists from good economic background, education and status have the basic qualities to play an active role in politics²⁹. This statement also is consistent with the biography of the Magar activists and leaders that are given in Appendix 4. Moreover, while conducting the interviews with Magar activists, the researcher found that almost all have good education, good economic status (as family backgrounds with ex-British, ex-Indian army or holding big lands), and have well connection with traditional ruling elites. In this regard, the elite formation of the Magars is somehow similar to what Federick Gaige observed in the case of Tarai. Accordingly to him "...control of land and high-caste status is decisive factors in politics". He further states that "only two groups, the hill Brahmins and Chhetris, posses all four of the prerequisites for successful participation in Nepalese national politics: control of economic resources, high-caste status, identification with the hill culture, and high level of educational attainment". Beside the Brahmins and Chhetris, only one group, the Newars, falls into the next category as getting participation in the polity of the Panchayat, "those who possess three of the four prerequisites mentioned above: control of economic resources, identification with the hill culture, and education" (Gaige, 1975 : 158-160).

There are many other factors for the exclusion of the Magars in politics. There has been a long tradition of the Magars to join the British and Indian Army rather than focus on education, domestic job or politics. The Magars who have been enjoying good job and good economic status do not seem to be interested in politics due to either their tendency of giving priority to a foreign job or leaving most of their life's useful time outside the country. On the contrary, some Magars who settle in the rural villages struggling for survival do not have the opportunity to socialise themselves in politics. Along with this, some activists put forth their views that Magars, being straight forward people, are not tactful, leading to their exclusion in politics. In addition, Magar identities are divided into two regions: south and north as Barha Magarant and Athara Magarant. Due to the diverse settlements, migration trends and fragmented identities of clan and culture found among the Magars extensively at the grassroots level prevent them from playing an active role in politics.

Magars from the southern parts were closer to the state and rulers due to their contribution in the unification process like the northern Magars. The north is geographically isolated, has no development infrastructure, and has no proper access to the state machineries. On the other side, the Magars from Barha Magarant region are much closer to the state and the rulers and they could not go against the rulers even when they were not well represented. The existing political system during Panchayat regime did not allow them to articulate their

²⁹ Interview with Bom Kumari Budha Magar, an advisor of the NMA and the chairman of the Athar Magarnati Culture Promotion Centre, 2063/9/10

interest either. However, after the political change of 1990 and 2006 they had the opportunity to promote their identity. Self-assessment of the Magars on their representation in the state affairs is presented in the table below:

Table No. 4.7

How do you find out Magars' representation in the polity of the state?

	Voters			Activists		
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Some	3	1.0	1.0			
A Few	244	81.3	81.3	73	97.3	97.3
Don't know	53	17.7	17.7	2	2.7	2.7
Total	300	100.0	100.0	75	100.0	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2006.

As per the table no. 4.7, the voters and the activists believe that Magars have few roles in the polity. In this regard, the overwhelming majority i.e. more than 81 percent voters and more than 97 percent activists believed that Magars had low representation in politics and the political institutions of the state. Whilst, 2.7 percent activists and 17.7 percent voters mentioned that they did not have any idea on this regard. Likewise, one percent voters think that they have some representation in politics.

Undoubtedly, most of the Magar activists alleged that the exclusionary nature of state is the main reason for their low level of the political participation. Therefore, almost all stressed on inclusive democracy for increasing their participation in politics. Besides inclusive democracy, they identified perceived many other important factors that could upgrade their role in state affairs. Magars have their own attitude learnt how of their participation in the polity of the state can be increased. Following table presents their views on how to increase Magars' participation in the polity.

Table No. 4.8**How to increase Magars' participation in the polity?**

Cause for promoting role in the polity	Voters		Activists	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Educational/political awareness	244	81.3	73	97.3
Unity among the Magars	174	58.0	49	65.3
Give up bad practices	103	34.3	39	52.0
Reservation	25	8.3	7	9.3
End of ethnic discrimination and policy for upliftment	30	10.0	16	21.3
Employment and development for Magar regions	52	17.3	9	12.0
Proportional representation in accordance with population	41	13.7	30	40.0
Don't know	37	12.3	-	-
Total	300	235.2	75	297.2

Source: Field Survey, 2006 / Percent based on multiple responses

The table no. 4.8 reveals that the Magar voters and activists both have similar perception about the educational and political awareness, unity among the Magars, and giving up the bad trends. Undoubtedly, these seem the core factors in order to increase their participation in the polity. In addition, activists prefer proportional representation to end indiscrimination and policy for the upliftment of their position. In the same manner, voters emphasise employment and development in the Magarant region and prefer proportional representation in order to increase their role in politics.

Recruiting in politics is not an accidental phenomenon rather it is the due process of political socialisation which is supplemented by various factors, institutions and agents such as education, economy, elite culture and inclusiveness of the state. These agents of political socialisation have a decisive role in promoting recruitment and leadership of people in politics. Likewise, the transformation from bad practices such as alcoholic to non alcoholic and uneducated to well educated, eagerness to adopt the modern socio-political values, and keeping ethnic identity distinct also appear to be effective in boosting their involvement in the socio-political sphere. These factors and agents among the Magars have caused exclusion in politics and the state affairs. Political history and ethnic identity of the Barha Magarant and Athar Magarant as well as their attachment and isolation with state respectively caused fragmentation within their community. On the other side, through significant participation in the Maoists insurgency, Magars are recognised as a major

excluded group along with their ethnic identity in the country and abroad. It has been mentioned above that due to exclusionary nature of the state and due prominence to the Nepali language and Hindu religion, most of Magars have lost their language. Hence, many have given up much of the animistic and shamanistic practices that were practised in the past. Magars had contributed substantially to the unification of Nepal, but as a group, they have seen themselves being increasingly marginalised since the fall of the regime of Rana Oligarchy. Moreover, they have been excluded in the polity of the state not only in the autocratic Rana and Panchayat system but also during the post 1990's democracy era. However, the *janandolan II* provided a conducive atmosphere to articulate the grievances of the excluded and the marginalised groups and succeeded in mobilising the ethnic commoners for seeking their role in the polity of state. It is hoped that many excluded groups like the Magars will increasingly receive significant representation in the decision making process, have access to the resources and the power of the state once the process of state restructuring is completed by the Constituent Assembly, which was formed after the Constituent Assembly elections held in April 2008.

4.8 Magars' anti-establishment movement

Since Nepali state has long existed as an exclusionary state, marginalised groups including Magars have attempted to change the nature of state by launching movements, sometimes overtly in the post-1990 period and covertly in pre-1990 period. There has been a long history of Magar uprising just like the anti-establishment activities of other ethnic groups. For instance, Limbus rebelled from 1776 to 1947, more than fifteen times against the infringement of their land by the Rana rulers. Around this period Murmi (Tamang) started peasant movement in Nuwakot and Rai (Khambu) revolted through the 'Bagyan Parba' for their rights to property and self rule. Similarly, the rebellion initiated by Sukhdev Gurung (Lamjung) in 1858, Lakhani Thapa Magar-II (Gorkha) in 1876, Supati Gurung (Gorkha) in 1877 and other many rebellions occurred against the state and Rana regime. They were the famous political rebellions in ethnic history³⁰ (see Appendix 3.1). Almost all these rebellions were oppressed and suppressed and many of the leaders and activists were killed by the rulers. Among them, the revolt done by Lakhani Thapa Magar-II has many features of historical movement of people against the despotic rulers. According to Lecomte-Tilouine, 'this rebel is a major figure in Magar ethnic activism and is also recognised as a revolutionary by the Maoists'. She further writes: 'This rebellion may shed light on current events by placing them in a historical continuity of revolutionary movements; in return, the current situation will

³⁰ See for further study, Gurung (2005 : 432), Sherchan (2004 : 9-10).

help to articulate the recent reinterpretation and instrumentalisation of this old rebellion within the framework of ethnic and/or political Magar movements' (Lecomte, 2002 : 246).

Two Magar heroes called Lakhan Thapa and Jayasing Chumi Rana initiated the first insurgency against the immediate Rana Prime Minister, Janga Bahadur and his system by forming the militia force. The Ranas suppressed them. It is supposed that the rebellion initiated by Lakhan Thapa Magar-II, in 1876 from Bungkot of Kule VDC, Gorkha was the first politically organised revolt to liberate the suppressed and oppressed people from the tyrannical despotic Rana regime and Janga Bahadur Rana in order to establish ideal king and society (*satya yug*). The army of the Rana arrested Lakhan Thapa with 7 other people and they were hung. The democratic government in 2007 recognised him as a martyr of the Nepal and fulfilled the demand of ethnic (Magar) activism for along time, the Magar activists have been demanding to declare him as the first martyr of Nepal and establish system of government holiday in the '*Magar Diwas*' (Magar day) on Falgun 15th (27th February) which is celebrated throughout the nation with the initiative of *Magar Sang* (NMA)³¹.

The anti-Rana movement that took place from 1947 to 1951, overthrew the Rana regime and established the democracy. Many ethnic and indigenous groups had an important role in ending out the Rana rule and establishing a democratic system in 1950/51. People of the ethnic group, ex-soldiers of the First and Second World War and the East Indian Company, and others from different groups were recruited in the Liberation Army to be fought against the Rana rule and its army. As a result, the democratic system was established in Nepal with great effort and contribution irrespective of the caste, clans and ethnic and indigenous identities. The ethnography of the first parliament in 1959 through the first general election shows a combination of different groups to some extent being represented in the parliament some candidates from ethnic and indigenous groups were elected to the House of Representatives.

³¹ Recently, in the auspicious day of the 26th Magar day in 27th February, 2008, Magar leaders and the activists once again demanded to declare Lakhan Thapa Magar as the first martyr of Nepal and to provide the government holiday in the Magar day. In Pokhara activists through Magar association organized a mass rally and a corner meeting in the Prithvi Chock, and they declared the Lakhan Thapa Chock instead of the Prithvi Chock. That was constructed in the memory of the king Prithvi Narayan Shah who founded the modern Nepal. In the mean time the NMA, Kaski decided to establish the statue of Lakhan Thapa Magar (second). Likewise, on the same day the Magar activists decided to establish the Statue of martyr Lakhan Thapa Magar in the public ground of Tansen bazaar of Palpa district, where the majority of the Magars are settled (Kantipur, National daily, Samadhan, Adarsha Samaj of the 28th February, 2008).

In the first democratic era (1951-1960), there was no proper representation in the polity of state from various ethnic groups. Hence, the freedom fighters from ethnic strata had been gradually marginalised in receiving the benefits of state resources. Therefore, the grievances gradually sprang up with an attempt to unite and form an organisation, All Nepal Backward Ethnic Groups Conference Organizing Committee which forwarded the ethnic movement³². Meanwhile, Magars who worked in the army also tried to organise themselves in the west Nepal to launch the ethnic movement itself. But the Royal Coup that was launched at the end of the 1960 banned all political liberties and dismissed the democratic system which was not favourable to the initial stage of the ethnic movement.

The organisational efforts of Magar began with the collapse of the Rana regime in 1951. Around 1953-1956, the political activists Kami Budha Magar, Barman Budha Magar and Dharma Bahadur Roka Magar initiated some insurgencies against the government and administration at the local level organising Magars through the leftist ideology in the west hills. At that time Magar meetings were conducted under the leadership of Eka Dev Ale and Ran Bahadur Ale in eastern Magarant (Tanahun). Likewise, Giri Prasad Budhathoki also initiated the first national level organisation called Magar Samaj Sudhar Sangh (Magar Society Reform Association) in Varse of Gulmi district. The Langhali Pariwar, Kanung Langhali Pariwar and Magar Samaj Sudhar Samiti appeared in the next two decades. Among them, the Langhali Pariwar established in 1970 seemed more effective among the Magars (MNLFF 2063VS). This organisation extended from west to east in order to unite Magars for their social welfare and interests. Some communist struggles against the local feudal and Panchas appeared quite frequently in west hills, particularly in Rolpa and Rukum. The Magar activism was conducted through the Langhali Pariwar till 1992 which then changed into the Nepal Magar Association (NMA). NMA is a national level ethnic organisation for Magar unity, solidarity and revitalising their identity. However, on

³² Although, three- fourth of the Liberation Army members were ethnic and indigenous who had a decisive role to bow down the Rana rulers to the rebellions democratic forces (Tamang 2056VS), but the educated elites who were involved in oppositional politics, particularly in Nepali Congress, as Brahmin and Chhetri strata, had again hegemony of the state power and resources. Ethnic people were called *Matwali* at that time and had greatly contributed to the 1950's revolution for democracy. Only few soldiers of the liberation army merged into *Rakshya Dal*. It is said that the leaders ignored the blood of the ethnic fighters who defeated the Rana's army but marginalised in the formal state affairs. The liberation army that led by the "Major Purna Singa Thakur, Major Dilman Singh Thapa Magar, Captain Budh Singh Gurung, Man Bahadur Rai, Gyan Bahadur Subba (Yakthungba), CB Rai, and Captain Thirbam Malla was disbanded" (Subba et. al. 2002: 41).

the other hand, many Magar activists are influenced by leftist ideology in the west Magarant and have been involved in different communist parties and are promoting their political activism. Such political socialisation has resulted in the formation of the Magar National Liberation Front (MNLF) which is an effective political organisation that can organise and mobilise Magars for the Maoist party.

The first democratic era (1951-1960) ended after democracy was seized by King Mahendra, who then implemented the Panchayat system that lasted for 30 years. The Panchayat system was an undemocratic system in which the activities of the political parties and ethnic organisations along with political liberties were strictly prohibited and banned. An individual could participate in the elections as a personal candidate only after the referendum of 1979. Although, Panchayat was centralised and autocratic system, it had its hierarchical system from the village and town Panchayat at the local level to the National Panchayat and legislative body at the central level. The local units such as village Panchayat was the platform for local people to participate at the local level and in decision making bodies in which Magar ethnic elites had shown their presence in order to rule themselves³³. However, the resources and the power were not given to these bodies, these were centralised under the control of monarchy. Besides the local government, some ethnic activists including Magar used to get representation in the central government. However, such representatives were neither represented nor responsible to their ethnic communities, but were devoted more to the King and the Panchayat system for their nomination.

After the referendum which was announced after the students' protest in 1980, the system became more flexible than the previous one in terms of the provision of direct election system. Political activities were conducted under the banners of sister and professional organisations. Likewise, some ethnic organisations were also established in order to maintain their ethnic identity. Magars themselves were organised in the Langhali Pariwar at the national level. It was later extended with the inclusion of

³³ According to the senior activists Dr. Keshar Jung Baral Magar, although the Panchayat system was undemocratic and no means of civil and political rights had been guaranteed to the people in general, the Magars had the candidacy and some of them won in the Magar villages through which there were at least some Magar local rulers in their dominated villages. When democracy was reestablished in 1990, the political parties, particularly the NC and UML selected Brahmin and Chhetri candidacies in Magar dominated villages. There was no option for Magars to choose their own representatives, therefore, they cast their votes according to the party lines. Due to this process of political socialisation, the divisions have been seen among the Magars eroding their ethnic unity and identity (Baral Magar 2063/9/12).

different Langhali Sangs in various districts including Kaski, Tanahun and Rupendehi although the situation was not favourable for ethnic activism³⁴.

If we analyse the ethnic composition of the National Panchayat in between 1967 to 1986, the Chhetris had more representation followed by the Brahmin. Dalits had no representation in the Panchayati national election. The tables that mentioned in Appendix 3 maintain that Newars had benefited from the system as they had enough representations in comparison to other ethnic and indigenous groups. Besides Newars, among the other 60 ethnic groups, only a few Gurung, Tamang, Rai, Limbu, Thakali, Tharu and Magar had the opportunity for representation in governance. During the King's rule, he nominated some ethnic leaders in the central legislative body. Among them, a Magar got chance to be a member of executive body. The ethnic representatives who had been involved in the Panchayati government, perhaps, were much more inclined towards the King or the Panchayat system rather than to their own ethnic groups. In the Panchayat era (1960-1990), the state was under absolute monarchy. During that time, Nepali state tried to make one nation with the slogan of one language that was Nepali, one religion that was Hindu and one dress that was used by the ruling elites without recognising the diverse culture, religion and ethnicity in the country. The parochial consideration towards Hindu religion being the traditional value of the state was mentioned even in the democratic constitution of 1990. The traditional values, based on the parochial consideration of Hinduism, has affected the society. As a result, the high caste hill groups dominated the various fields of state (Baral 1993 : 195-196).

Post 1990 democracy is regarded as a period of articulating Magar interests and the advocacy of inclusive democracy (1990-2007). Democracy restored in 1990 through the people's movement led to the establishment of political rights and the opening of political parties. The Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal, 1990 declared for the first time in the history of the constitution that Nepal is a multiethnic, multilingual and multicultural country. By its provisions, political/civil rights and the multiethnic character favoured ethnic, Dalit and women activism. Along with many political parties and ethnic and civil societies, Nepal Magar Association (NMA) and many other Magar organisations at the grass roots emerged in this atmosphere. By their activism, Magars were more or less successful in articulating their ethnic interests.

³⁴ Gurungs in Pokhara were united under the Tamu-Dhi, Kaski. Karma Gurung, the founder chairman of this Gurung ethnic organisation, said in her interview that it was very difficult to be an ethnic activist and to do ethnic activities. Accordingly, she was tortured many times by the local Panchayati administrators for putting forward ethnic activism.

Through continuous activism by the Magar and other ethnic groups, the Ethnic/Indigenous Upliftment Council and Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN) have been formed for the all development of ethnic groups including Magars.

Some achievements were made after the post 1990 democracy. The major gain was to declare Nepal as a 'multiethnic and multicultural state' for the first time in the constitutional history. But the traditional type of liberal democracy could not change the exclusionary structure of the Nepali state like the Kathmandu centric development, centralisation of power and resources and exclusion of large segment of the population. On the other side, the state remained only as a playground and hegemony of those traditional elites from high cast hill group. The political parties could not manage different ethnic identities and also could not control rampant corruption, disorder and violence (Baral, 2004).

By the time, the CPN Maoist began the people's war in February 1996 catalysing the excluded voices of the marginal groups of the people in general, who had sentiments against the state and the ruling classes. As an excluded ethnic group in the state, Magars have significantly contributed to the war through their direct participation in the militias. Hence, as a sister organisation of the Maoist party, the MNLF (Magar National Liberation Front) was established in 1998 in order to organise the Magars in general and mobilise them towards the people's war. During the war, Magars contributed significantly to extend the war throughout the nation. Different studies show that in comparison with other ethnic and caste groups, Magars were found more sacrificing in the war (Maharjan, 2002; Thapa, 2004; De sales 2002). One of the Magar publications states that more than 550 Magars were casualties only in the Rolpa district (MNLF 2063VS). Therefore, it is said that Magars have played a significant role in the Maoist war and Maoists have strengthened the Magar identity in Nepal and abroad.

In the post 1990 period, numerous ethnic organisations including *Magar Sang* and other Magar organizations were formed to revitalise and articulate their own ethnic identity and their demands for the inclusion in polity through the mobilisation of the Magars by peaceful means. On the other side, Magars had been participating in the peoples' war violently initiated by the Maoist in order to establish co-existential and equitable society to abolish the feudal landlords and reactionary forces of the

traditional ruling elites of the state with their philosophy of fusion of class liberation and ethnic liberation³⁵. However, both measures increased the role of Magars in the polity to revitalise their ethnic identity. Hence, “both advocate something approaching a utopian ideology, i.e. they aim to build an ideal society where there will no longer be rich or poor, low or high, alcoholism, etc” (Lecomte-Tilouine, 2002 : 246).

By April 2006, people in general along with political and ethnic forces marched on the streets throughout the country in favour of a republic and inclusive democracy for 19 days, known as *Janandolan-II*. Following the sentiments of the movement, the Interim Constitution of Nepal – 2007 was made through its first amendment, in embraced a republic instead of constitutional monarchy, and secularism instead of a Hindu Kingdom. This can be considered a great achievement of ethnic activism and it is justice for other religious groups as they are treated equally under the new arrangement. Since the movement, Magar and other various ethnic organisations have demanded inclusive democracy through the introduction of a quota system as proportional to their population. Recently they have demanded proportional representation system and the establishment of an autonomous ethnic region (SMM, 2065). Since the establishment of NMA in the post 1990 democracy, Magar activists have been continuously putting forward their interest of empowerment in the mainstream politics along with promotion of their ethnic identity. According to democratic theory, political conflict and violence is more prone in open politics because the dominated population has space to articulate frustrations but do not have any political power to bring the necessary changes. Therefore, the main thrust of the argument is that their interests and demands, or political representation, could be addressed as logically and reasonably as possible. State-sponsored nation-building through linguistic and religious ‘integration’ generated an identity crisis among the ethnic groups. Ethnic activists responded to this crisis by directing their activities to issues of ethnic identification.

After the April 2006 revolution, ethnic activists’ agendas became even more political. They demanded an equal share in state authority by means of adequate representation in all government institutions, as well as ethnic autonomy. Some achievements were made after the success of *janandolan-II* (April revolution) in favour of ethnic groups

³⁵ According to an interview with Suresh Ale Magar and Lok Bahadur Thapa Magar, Maoist War is actually conducted for emancipation of the ethnic people, like Magars along with achieving Magarant federal state and that is possible only through the Prachanda Path as fusion of ethnic liberation and class liberation together.

as described in the report of ‘Nepal in Transition: A Study on the State of Democracy’ (Hachhethu 2008 : 74). The report also shows that the state has been sensitive since *janandolan* II to consider the agendas of marginalised and excluded groups like ethnic, Dalits, Madhesi and women. However, Magars, as a marginal ethnic group, have succeeded in increasing their role in the state affairs by getting more seats in the Interim Parliament and in CA in comparison to past elections for decision making bodies. Hence, the process of empowering the oppressed and suppressed groups has begun through the election of Constituent Assembly (CA). It has composed by the representatives of the sovereign citizens from the various groups and sectors of the society. Therefore, CA is only a legitimate meant to restructure the state and to distribute the power and resources of the state to all segments and group of people. Moreover, CA has regarded as foundation of Nepali nation building through which the people in general seek to the new constitution for peace and progress with institutionalization of inclusive democracy.

CHAPTER V

MAGAR (ETHNIC) ACTIVISM:

A STUDY OF THEIR ORGANISATIONS IN

KASKI, MYAGDI AND PALPA DISTRICTS

5.1 Introduction: The rise of ethnic activism in Nepal

This chapter 6 concentrates on activism of Magar organizations in the broader and historical context of the rise of ethnicity in Nepal. Magar activism is aimed to revitalise Magar ethnic groups in social, cultural, economic, and political fields. Magar activists are those people who devote their time and intellectual ability to attain these goals. Magars, by their ethnic activism, actively participate in the assertion of linguistic, religious, cultural, and other ethnic rights. They are usually in some way associated with different local and community based organizations, hence, most are related to Magar Association and organisations affiliated with it. About the larger picture of ethnicity in Nepal, activism is observed, “... as the practice of campaigning to re-make the world in line with a consciously articulated programme,” where activists are “members of organisations dedicated to those ends” (Gellner and Karki, 2007 : 363). In Nepalese context, activism has been understood a means to bring about changes in political, social, educational, and cultural sectors. In the post-1990 democratic period ethnic revivalism has been found to have occurred as ethnic activists are seeking government recognition, a consolidated ethno-political identity, and participation in the institutions of the state.

The history of modern activism in Nepal can be traced back to the Rana regime in the 1920s. At that time it was difficult to be an activist or to launch campaigns, even in social and cultural sectors. The 1951 revolution overthrew the autocratic Rana rule and established an environment in which people were able to form various organisations. This lasted only a decade between 1951-1960. During the Panchayat regime which ruled for thirty years, it was prohibited to form organisations and bring about cultural and political changes. Although cultural and religious organisations were tolerated, they were not allowed to have any political smells. Activism in all fields began to flourish only after the restoration of democracy in 1990. As Krishna Hachhethu has observed that, “the restoration of democracy with the principles of popular sovereignty, equality, freedom, and cultural rights has provided the platform for ethnic activism” (2003 : 233).

The post 1990 period in Nepal, with its open political environment, presented an opportunity for all sorts of campaigns and organisations and the rise of various political, quasi-political, and ethnic organisations. These conditions gave rise to the perception of inequality and exclusion in mainstream politics. Although people could express their dissatisfaction in these circumstances, they could not affect any changes in the absence of legitimate power and authoritative representation (Baral, 2004; Lawoti, 2005). With the advent of democracy, the grievances of the marginal and excluded groups appeared in the polity of the state. In addition to these and other political reasons, the Maoists' armed revolt that began in February 1996 in order to seek people's new democracy along with assuring the ethnic liberty and equality among the various strata of society have only drawn more attention to ethnic activism. Undoubtedly, the ethnic consciousness and awareness has been raised with restoration of the democracy in 1990, but the ethnic agendas have gained a new weight as Maoist prioritised the ethnic grievances for seeking their support to the war. Hence, the activism that has been initiated by the ethnic organisations during the *janandolan* II (April-2006 revolution) and then after significantly contributed to mobilise and politicise the ethnic population towards inclusive democracy. The ethnic activism turned to politics as quest for proper representation in the state affairs and political identity initiated by NEFIN and ethnic wings of political parties.

The successful restoration of democracy in Nepal has created an environment in which ethnic groups, Dalits, and women have formed organisations, articulated their interests, and expressed their dissatisfaction against inequality, injustice, and exclusion from democratic processes. A large number of ethnic, Dalit, women, and human rights organisations has been working to build coalitions and exert pressure on the state. The activists in such organisations have succeeded in establishing the National Human Rights Commission, the National Women's Commission, the Dalit Commission, and the Nepal Foundation for Indigenous Nationalities (NFDIN). The Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN) which pushed for the establishment of NFDIN by the government aims to have one representative organisation from each of Nepal's 59 officially recognised nationalities (*Janajatis*). There are by now 54 such organisations, with only five small groups lacking representation. NEFIN has emerged as a significant player in post-2006 politics in Nepal and a strong backer of ethnic federalism and proportional representation system. State-sponsored nation-building through linguistic and religious 'integration' has generated an identity crisis among ethnic groups. Ethnic activists responded by directing their activities to issues of ethnic identification. After the April (2006) revolution (*janandolan-II*), ethnic activists' agendas became even more political.

They demanded an equal share in state authority by means of adequate representation in all government institutions, as well as ethnic autonomy.

Magar as an ethnic group has been playing a prominent role in the promotion of ethnic activism through their activists and organisations for a long time. Many Magar organisations have been established at different times of ethnic history. At present, Nepal Magar Association (NMA), Nepal Magar Buddhist Service Committee and Pun Society are the major organisations in terms of mobilising the Magar people for ethnic activism. In addition, National Magar Liberation Front (NMLF), a sister organisation of the Maoist party, is working among the Magars for seeking Magarant Autonomous Region as per Maoist ideology. Likewise, in order to socialise Magar through their political ideologies, different political parties, particularly after April (2006) revolution, have begun to organise sister wing within the Magar community. Other Magar organisations are in existence throughout the country which are either affiliated within these umbrella organisations or carrying out their activities independently. Among the Magar organisations that are found at the local level in Kaski, Myagdi and Palpa districts, the major ones are the following:

Nepal Magar Association (NMA), Nepal Magar Women Association (NMWA), Nepal Magar Student Association (NMSA), Pun Society (PS), Magar National Liberation Front (MNLF), Nepal Republic Magar Association (NRMA), and Nepal Democratic Magar Association (NDMA). So far as Pun Society is concerned, it has significantly been functioning in Kaski, with its headquarter in Pokhara, while neither any activity nor any unit of this organisation is found in Palpa and Myagdi districts. Recently, Pun activists have organised the national level Pun Society - Nepal (PSN) in Pokhara and through this organisation they have conducted activism for seeking recognition to give separate identity than that of the NMA.

5.2 The Magar Sangh Vs the Pun Samaj

Compared to Kaski and Pokhara, the Magar activism has been a recent phenomenon in Myagdi and Palpa in terms of establishment and activities of the Magar organisation. The history of their activism is connected and had begun with Langhali Sangh in Kaski but it was started in Myagdi and Palpa only after the formation of NMA in 1992. In the early stage of the 1980s, the Langhali Sangh-Kaski was formed under the leadership of Lt. Khaka Pun. During this period, Capt. Krishna Bahadur Thapa, Jagat Mohan Pun, and Capt. Hum Bahadur Thapa were the other activists involved. These Magar activists, who had first come to Pokhara from various villages of Kaski, Syanja and Myagdi districts, were either former soldiers, or came from such

families. Captain Krishna Bahadur Thapa, Keshar J. Baral, Bhagawan Singh Ale, Bal Bahadur Ale, Captain Chabi Lal Rana, Captain Jagat Mohan Pun, and R. B Thapa, along with the existing Langhali members established the community-based Mankamana English Boarding School to promote Magar identity, and to impart high-quality education to Magars and other children. After three years, the school's property became an issue of conflict among the activists and the founders of this institution, which was an unnecessary conflict and ego among the activists of Pun and Thapa-Rana. Ultimately, a case was brought to the District Administration (Government) Office, Kaski. The conflict between Thapa-Rana activists and Pun activists sharpened, and it led to the division of Magar activists into the local branch of NMA and PS. Such a conflict does not exist in Palpa and the hills of Kaski or even in Myagdi district – the original home of the Pun Magars – where all Magars are involved in NMA and there is no separate organisation for the Puns like the Pun Society in Pokhara.

The Langhali Sangh, under the leadership of Lt. Khaka Pun, was not active in launching revitalisation programmes in favour of the whole Magar communities. In 1992, a gathering was held at the Shiva Mandir in Pokhara and an ad hoc committee was formed under the leadership of Capt. Krishna Bahadur Thapa Magar – this organisation became the NMA-Kaski. Likewise, a democratic process was followed in the fifth conference of the NMA-Kaski to elect the members as well as officials of the Executive Committee. Since then, some oppositional voices from dissatisfied activists have been heard in each of its general conference.

Local Pun activists who were excluded from NMA set up the PS in 1993. Lt. Khaka Pun, deposed chairman of the Langhali Sangh, became the first chairman of the PS. It seems that the immediate senior Magar activists from the Thapa-Rana clans have been enjoying the leadership of the NMA, while some activists of Pun clans were excluded from reasonable representation. This was the primary reason why the Pun activists established the PS as a separate organisation for Pun people. In this regard, the view of Shanti Pun seemed more close to the fact. She said that she had contested the post of chairman in NMWA-Kaski, but the leaders of the NMA were against her candidacy, made certain she was defeated. Therefore, she joined the PS. On the contrary, Khaka Pun, who expressed his opinion through local newspaper that Puns are not the Magar, told the researcher that he would like to join a large Magar organisation like NMA. Those who have been dominating the leadership in the NMA-Kaski have not considered giving space in their organisation to senior Pun activists like him. In Nepal, there is no tradition of leaders transferring power and

leadership from the old generation to the new generation. The same leader usually tries to stay in power both in political parties and in ethnic organisations. This is one of the factors that led to the split between political parties and ethnic organisations. Not only the NMA-Kaski, or the Tamu Dhi, but the PS also has this problem. Among the Pun activists there was a debate over the chairman's post between a junior officer and a non-officer in 1998, before the general election in 1999. Sergeant Harka Pun became a candidate for the position of Member of Parliament for the House of Representatives from the NCP-ML and Lt. Khaka Pun became the Vice-President of the Samata Party. Therefore, Mrs. Raj Kumari Pun, who had been the Vice President at that time, bagged the Chairman of the PS-Kaski. Recently, Pun activists established the Pun Society-Nepal in order to organise the Pun people throughout the country and to seek own ethnic identity.

Besides the PS, the MNLF and the Magar Samparka Samiti (Magar Recognition Committee) came into existence in Kaski in 2001. In the meantime, conflict was also created in the NMA, when the fourth conference was held in 2001 in Kaski on the issue of legal representation and voting rights. Due to a dispute over voting rights, nearly half the delegates boycotted the conference and the rest delegates elected new executive committee of the NMA-Kaski. The opposed activists held a separate gathering and formed *Magar Samparka Samiti*. It was later dissolved when the NMA refused to recognise it³⁶. The issue of dissatisfaction with the leading figures in Kaski Magar Sangh, however, has not been resolved. Though the causes of conflict still exist, disagreements lie dormant because most of the Magar activists and their followers are now affiliated with the NMA-Kaski. Likewise, though the MNLF established earlier, it was passive before the April revolution. It was not active due to suppression from the government as it was accused of acting as a Maoist front organisation. Some of its leading figures were underground, a few of them were in

³⁶ This *Magar Samparka Samiti* was formed mainly due to behind-the-scenes support by the activists from the Pun Samaj and the MNLF. The chairman of that committee, Tilak Pun, and the main guest of that function, Yam Bahadur Thapa, who was the secretary of Magar Sangh at that time, both said through their interviews with author as it was just a form of protest against the monopoly of the few senior activists in Nepal Magar Sangh.

jail, and some others were no longer active in politics³⁷. However, the MNLF and its senior leaders have been re-activating with the advent of *janandolan* II and extending the organisation among the Magars in Kaski. Magar activists in Kaski through their identities and organisations had actively participated in the *janandolan* II. Almost all those activists who participated in the revolution expressed their views for peace, development and stability through inclusive democracy and consensus between political parties and ethnic organisations (Baral 2063VS).

The PS in essence is based on the identity of the Pun people. Some Pun Samaj and women's groups are active at the grass roots (Ward and Tole) level in different parts of Pokhara. They have their own property, land and buildings like NMA preliminary committees at different parts of Pokhara. Some activists of the PS are gradually merging with the NMA-Kaski. Relatively the Pun women have been more mobilised in NMA's activities today. At present, a senior Pun woman activist holds the chairman post in NMWA-Kaski. Some Pun activists alleged that a few senior Pun leaders wanted the division among the Magars of Kaski in order to control the Pun people for their political and economic benefit. The Pun Youth Society is active among the Pun communities. It has conducted many creative activists for the welfare of Pun people. They participate in the activities and programmes conducted by both organisations, NMA and PS. Most of the young Pun activists define themselves as Magars with a separate Pun identity. They consider NMA to be a broad umbrella organisation for all Magars. On the contrary, some Pun activists have established Pun Society, Nepal as the separate ethnic organisation through their Pun identity at the national level. They organised a national gathering of Pun activists in Pokhara and demanded the recognition of the Pun people with separate ethnic identity by their convention held a few months ago. Likewise, Chantyal Sangh was established and it got recognition with NMA. However, lacking the provision in the constitution of NMA for recognising Pun identity along with their organisations on the one hand and some personal egoism of senior activists from both sides on the other, has divided NMA and PS as two separate ethnic organizations for Magars in Kaski.

³⁷ One of the leading figures at the central level in the MNLF from Kaski supposedly was Lok Bahadur Thapa Magar. He was the founder chairman of MNLF and regarded to be one of the planners for proposing a Magarant Autonomous Region with established a Maoist's Magar organization (Thapa Magar 2056, 2058BS; Lecomte-Tilouine 2004). He was no longer active in some years of the conflict era due to the threat and torture from state personnel. Now he has been reactivating himself since the post April (2006) revolution as an advisor to the central committee of the MNLF, and he has said in his interview with author there is only means of the Magar liberation that is *Prachands Path* and the Maoist party.

5.3 Magars' Affiliation with their ethnic Organisations

Ethnic activism is systematically brought forward through their organisations. Such organisations have a crucial role in mobilising ethnic people to attain their goals. Therefore, if the ethnic organisations are disseminated among their population, then their activism will realise greater success in terms of seeking ends. So far the activism initiated by the Magar organisations can be seen in three districts: Kaski, Myagdi and Palpa. Through their functioning, it is found that majority of Magars at the local level are acquainted to their ethnic association which is shown in the following table.

Table No. 5.1
Do you know about the existence of Magar organisation?

	Voters			Activists			Frequency		
	Yes	No	Total	Yes	No	Total	Yes	No	Total
Kaski	95 95.0%	5 5.0%	100 100%	25 100.0%		25 100%	120 96.0%	5 4.0%	125 100%
Myagdi	46 46.0%	54 54.0%	100 100%	24 96.0%	1 4.0%	25 100%	70 56.0%	55 44.0%	125 100%
Palpa	52 52.0%	48 48.0%	100 100%	21 84.0%	4 16.0%	25 100%	73 58.4%	52 41.6%	125 100%
Total	193 64.3%	107 35.7%	300 100%	70 93.3%	5 6.7%	75 100%	263 70.1%	112 29.9%	375 100%

Source: Field Survey 2006.

According to table 5.1, out of the 375 total respondents, 70 percent have knowledge about the existence of the Magar organisation but 30 percent respondents were unaware about it. Likewise, the table reveals that in comparison to voters (64 percent), most of the activists (93 percent) are familiar with their ethnic organisations. Activists, due to their nature to seek information and schooling, have much knowledge about their ethnic organisation and their ethnic activism. If one goes through cross tabulation analysis that interfaces the districts and the Magar organisations, the output shows that the Magars from Kaski rather than Palpa and Myagdi are more familiar with their ethnic organisation. Out of the 125 total respondents in each district, 96 percent Magars of Kaski have noticed the Magar organisation followed by Palpa 58 percent and Myagdi 56 percent respectively.

Indeed, the activities of the Magar organisations help to promote their ethnic identity among the Magars in general. In this perspective, the NMA-Kaski relatively with the

NMA-Palpa and Myagdi is far better in their activism, particularly on language and cultural sectors. The NMA-Kaski and its student wing often conduct the language orientation and revitalisation programmes for the Magar students and their members at the grass roots level. Likewise, NMA-Kaski and PS arrange the cultural programmes where they perform their distinct traditional heritage. Sometime they organise a procession and mass meeting with their own dress. For conducting different activities and the programmes, PS and NMA have their own buildings and place. To launch various activities officially and systematically, Magar activists in Kaski district have erected a building in Pokhara naming it Nepal Magar Sangh. The other units of Magar Organizations have been found possessing their own buildings and properties so that they have found it convenient to carry out various activities. They have regularly conducted their official meetings and organised various activities in order to increase ethnic and political awareness among the Magars in general. Likewise, in some of their dominant areas, Pun societies have their own building or land. Moreover, their effectiveness is clearly visible in their unity and solidarity along with their distinct ethnic identity. Although, NMA-Myagdi has its building in Beni bazaar, the executive committee has not been effective due to the conflict among its activists. The preliminary committees have not been activated regularly at the grass roots level. Hence, most of its leaders have migrated to Pokhara and other parts of Nepal and abroad and they could not handover their responsibility to any newly formed committee. These are also the reasons of Magar organisation being less active in their functioning. Likewise, activities of the NMA-Palpa have not been found smooth in relation to those of Kaski and even Myagdi. In terms of property and performances, NMA - Palpa is behind them.

In order to do public work, activists and the leaders should have the effort, commitment, devotion and good economic status. Moreover, they should be able to manage their time for the organizational work. Due to these reasons, the NMA in Palpa and Myagdi are less effective than in Kaski. In this regard, both leading activists³⁸ of the NMA Myagdi and Palpa are supposedly close to this reality. They stated that in order to be fully active in their ethnic organization, two things are essential; first, enough income in terms of good economic status and enough time to devote for activism, which they do not have. Furthermore, ethnic activism and their organisations are centered in urban areas. Those activists, who have permanent residents in such urban centers and can afford more time for their activism, also hold the leadership in the ethnic organisation. In addition to the judgments of Magar

³⁸ Interviews with Bal Ram Rana Magar - the Chairman of NMA-Palpa and Dammar Purja Magar - the Chairman of NMA Myagdi.

leaders, lack of these facilities has rendered Magar activism less effective in Myagdi and Palpa. Besides this, though their number is low in the headquarters of these districts, Magars have significant population in the rural parts of Palpa and Myagdi where they are in dominant position; therefore, they could not have any minority feeling. On the other side, although they have significantly settled in Pokhara city of Kaski district, they have remained the ethnic minority and migrated strata of the population. According to a senior activist, Lok Bahadur Thapa Magar, around twenty five years ago, a Magar guy died and no body came to help. The next day, the house owner came and asked him that ‘you are the Magar, there is a Magar dead body, please help for its funeral process’. Then he called other Magars and did the funeral. He further sated that by the time he and a few other Magars felt essential to have their own ethnic organisation that can be helpful in their difficulties. Therefore, they established the *Gumasta* as the first ethnic organisation at Ram bazaar of Pokhara for unity and cooperation among the Magars³⁹. However, ethnic unity and solidarity is essenatial for minorities and people who have migrated to the new places. This reality is found in Kaski rather than in Palpa and Myagdi in terms of effectiveness of Magar activism and their organisations. Following table shows an interesting variation in terms of Magars’ affiliation in between political party and ethnic organisation.

Table No. 5.2
Are you affiliated with any political party or Ethnic Organisation?

	Political Party						Ethnic Organisation					
	Voters			Activists			Voters			Activists		
	Yes	No	Total	Yes	No	Total	Yes	No	Total	Yes	No	Total
Kaski	32	68	100	25	-	25	86	14	100	24	1	25
Myagdi	58	42	100	25	-	25	15	85	100	17	8	25
Palpa	41	59	100	25	-	25	16	84	100	13	12	25
Total	131	169	300	75	-	75	117	183	300	54	21	75
Percent	43.7 %	56.3 %	100.0 %	100 %		100 %	39.0 %	61.0 %	100.0 %	72.0 %	28.0 %	100.0 %

Source: Field Survey 2006.

According to table no. 5.2, the Magar activists or voters are more affiliated with political parties rather than their own ethnic organisation. Almost all (100 percent) activists are overtly or covertly involved in party politics followed by 44 percent commoners (voters). On the contrary, only 72 percent activists followed by 39

³⁹ Interview with the Lok Bahardur Thapa Magar who initiated first to establish the Magar organisation in Ram Bazaar of the Pokhara, Kaski.

percent voters have organisational affiliation whereas 28 percent activists followed by 61 percent general voters who have no involvement with their own ethnic organisation. Likewise, Magars in Palpa followed by Myagdi, where they are in majority, are more affiliated with political party than with their ethnic organisation. In reverse, the Magars in Kaski, where they are in minority, are much associated with their ethnic organisations rather than the political parties. Likewise, the Magars from urban areas are more affiliated with their ethnic organisation rather than rural parts (see in Appendix 5). If we take an average percentage, around 55 percent Magar are involved in party politics whereas, only 45.6 percent Magars are affiliated with their ethnic organisation (see Table no. 7.2). It is because, Magar organisations are limited only in urban centre, whereas, the activities and the organisations of the political parties are not so visible at the very local level.

As per table no. 5.2, it shows that voters and activists of the Myagdi and Palpa rather than Kaski are more involved in the party politics rather than their own ethnic organisation. The Magars, where they are in dominating position in terms of settlement in particular areas, are found less attracted to the ethnic organisation. In this context, they are more concerned with the party's ideology rather than their own ethnic identity. It shows that the activism for solidarity and unity, particularly on the basis of language and cultural revitalization is not necessarily relevant. On the contrary, where Magars are in minority and have migrated to the urban hub, they are more concerned about their ethnic organisation for unity, cooperation and existence through their ethnic values. However, due to existence of political parties at the grass roots level than that of their ethnic organisations in socialising the Magar people, political ideology plays an effective role rather than their ethnic feelings. Hence, Magars cast their votes in elections through political affiliation rather than own ethnic identity (see in Appendix 6). A study has also proved that not only Magars, but Gurungs also cast their votes by the party line instead of their ethnic identity (Gurung, 2006). It is because; political parties are active in most of the places, both in rural and urban. Therefore, Magars were more mobilised through the party ideology, while, Magar organisations are more concentrated in the urban centers and among the educated people rather than in rural areas and Magars at the grass roots level. However, it seems that their participation and activeness in politics is based on education, ethnic awareness, economic status, and nature of their settlements and feelings of ethnic identity (see in detail, Appendix 4 and 5). Following table reveals the existence of the Magar organisation at local level and their affiliation.

Table No. 5.3
In which Magar organisation are you affiliated?

	Voters				Activists				Frequency	Valid
	Kaski	Myagdi	Palpa	Total	Kaski	Myagdi	Palpa	Total	Total	Percent
NMA	52 54.7%	9 19.6%	16 30.8%	77 39.9%	19 76.0%	11 45.8%	11 52.4%	41 58.6%	118 31.5%	44.9
Pun Society	20 21.1%	2 4.3%		22 11.4%	2 8.0%	1 4.2%		3 4.3%	25 6.7%	9.5
Both, 1 and 2	11 11.6%			11 5.7%	2 8.0%	2 8.3%		4 5.7%	15 4.0%	5.7
MNLF	3 3.2%	7 15.2%	5 9.6%	7 3.6%	1 4.0%	3 12.5%	2 9.5%	6 8.6%	13 3.5%	4.9
Not affiliated	9 9.5%	31 67.4%	36 69.2%	76 39.4%	1 4.0%	7 29.2%	8 38.1%	16 22.9%	92 24.5%	35.0
Total	95 100%	46 100%	52 100%	193 100%	25 100%	24 100%	21 100%	70 100%	263 70.1%	100.0
Missing	5	54	48	107		1	4	5	112 29.9%	
Total	100	100	100	300	25	25	25	75	375 100%	

Source: Field Survey, 2006.

According to table no. 5.3, among the various Magar organisations, NMA is effectively extended in all three districts rather than Pun society and MNLF. Among those who have knowledge about their Magar organisation, around 55 percent voters and 76 percent activists are involved in NMA-Kaski followed by around 31 percent voters and 52 percent activist in NMA-Palpa and around 20 percent activists and around 46 percent activists in NMA-Myagdi respectively. Some Magars in Kaski equally prefer the NMA and Pun society; therefore, they had dual membership. Likewise, Pun society is seen more active among the Pun Magars in Kaski and very few of them support this society in Myagdi, but no Magar is found in favour of this activism in Palpa. Such organisation was not there in Myagdi and Palpa. Those who are affiliated with this organisation in the district are overtly or covertly influenced through the Pun society in Kaski. The table no. 5.3 also exhibits that the MNLF, the sister ethnic organisation of the Maoist Party, compared to Kaski district is more active in Myagdi and Palpa.

In his observations since in programmes of MNLF that were conducted in Pokhara and Kaski every year, the researcher found that only a few local Magars had participated in 2006, but the number of participants had increased in 2007 and more

so in 2008. An activist of MNLF stated that his ethnic organisation was very popular among the Magars, because of its clear policy for Magar's empowerment in polity. Some of them with whom the researcher talked stated that 'they support the MNLF because of its effective activism as per the Magar interests'. Since its establishment, MNLF has been functioning at the grass roots through mobilisation of the Magars for political rights and ethnic identity. Hence, MNLF has become popular among the Magars by their activism for proportional representation in state affairs and autonomy of Magarant federal province. The activism of MNLF and the ethnic mobilisation of the Maoist party ultimately brought (infused) ethnicity and politics together. As a result, ethnic organisations themselves including NMA promote activism, demanding ethnic autonomy and more space in the state affairs in proportion to their population with ethnic identity. Ethnic politics is the enter piece of contemporary politics in Nepal. The ideology of ethnic politics carried out by NMLF has greater influence over the activities and leadership of the NMA. Hence, as the latest development in ethnic (Magar) politics, the SMM (*Samukta Magar Manch* (JMF, 2009) has been formed with the initiative of Magar sister organisations of different political parties and NMA. However, almost all political and ethnic forces accept that politics and ethnicity go side by side in multicultural society in order to address the grievances of the excluded and underprivileged groups through inclusive democracy.

Affiliation with ethnic organisations is not only means of mobilising people to their ends, it is also an avenue for increasing ethnic and political awareness. These forms of socialisation, indeed, have the manifest role for developing the culture of participation. The trend of Magar participation in the political party and their ethnic organisation is given in the following table.

Table No. 5.4
How often do you participate in the programmes of political party
and Ethnic organisation?

	Political Party								Ethnic Organisation							
	Voters				Activists				Voters				Activists			
	Regula r	S T	N P	Tota l	Regula r	S T	N P	Tota l	Regula r	S T	N P	Tota l	Regula r	S T	Tota l	
Kaski	2	1 3	1 7	32	4	1 7	4	25	10	6 2	1 4	86	19	5	24	
Myagd i	1	4 1	1 6	58	9	1 4	2	25	2	1 2	1	15	8	9	17	
Palpa	1	3 1	9	41	12	1 3	-	25	4	1 2		16	10	3	13	

Total	4	8 5	4 2	131	25	4 4	6	75	16	8 6	1 5	117	37	1 7	54
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Note: S T-Some Times, N P- Not Participate. Source: Field Survey 2006.

As per table no. 5.4, general Magar people are more active in their ethnic organisation, whereas activists are more active in political party. Both activists and voters of Kaski participate more in the activities of their Magar organizations compared to those of Myagdi and Palpa. The above table also shows that Magars in Myagdi and Palpa are more active in the political party rather than in their ethnic organisations. It shows that among the three districts, ethnic activism is more effective in Kaski, whereas political activism is found active in Myagdi and Palpa respectively. Going through the cross tabulation analyses in between table no. 5.4 (also Appendix 5.4) and 7.5 (chapter seven), it seems that 13.6 percent Magar are regularly attending the activities of political parties followed by 66 percent participating sometimes and 20.4 percent not participating at all. Likewise, in the case of the Magar organisations, around 30 percent are regularly participating in its activities followed by the 61.4 percent participating sometimes and 8.8 percent not participating. It shows that though Magars are more affiliated with party politics, they are relatively likely to participate in the functions of their ethnic organisations. This is due to the fact that those Magars who live in urban areas are more active in such ethnic organisations. On the other hand, ethnic organisation is a common platform for all Magars irrespective of their political ideologies. It seems that Magars in Kaski, as minority ethnic group and the activism centered in the urban hubs, have participated more in their organisational activities compared to Palpa and Myagdi. It can be concluded that the ethnic feeling is more acute in a heterogeneous society rather than in a homogenous society. In addition to this, the Magar activism is more centered in urban areas particularly in the big cities compared to rural area.

5.4 An Account of Magar Activism

As mentioned in the above sections, since their establishment Magar organisations have been actively promoting activism in Kaski much earlier than in Myagdi and Palpa. Magar activism of this sort began in the 1950s in various forms and in several districts, but it only became more effective at the national level in the 1980s, with the establishment of *Langhali Sangh*. It has mainly focused on revitalisation of language, religion, culture, and rituals among the Magars. Langhali Sangh became the Nepal Magar Association in 1992 and is registered with the government. The main objectives of the NMA are: to promote development in the country, to create unity among the Magars, to protect and promote Magar language, script, culture, and history, to encourage the use of Magar language in education, and to make the Magar

community prosperous through various programmes such as publications, interactions, mass meetings, discussion, removing the bad customs and traditions etc. (NMA 2049/1992).

The history of Magar activism shows that it began in the early 1980s in Kaski with the formation of Langhali Sangh while it came as an effective movement in Myagdi and Palpa only in the post 1990 period. Early Magar activists in Kaski used their energy to further increase their status through Sanskritisation and cultural assimilation. Later, their activism was much dominated by the activists from ex-army background. Likewise, the NMA has tried to focus their activism on Magar language, and Buddhist religion against Hindu, but the Magar activists in Kaski as well as in Myagdi and Palpa are not satisfied with the NMA's policy at the centre. Almost all activists at the local level stated that 'it is very difficult to apply in practice activism for their mother tongue and Buddhism through community revitalisation programmes among the Magars in the grass roots. It is because, their language and religion have been heavily influenced by the process of Sanskritisation and Hinduisation. Through the researcher's observation in Magar communities of these districts, it seems that a few activists have tried to adopt their earlier practices as their ethnic identity. But most activists and intellectuals have stressed that Magars and their organisations should bring changes in their 'negative' practices, customs, and traditions on the one hand, and their desire to preserve their identity by continuing the positive values inherent in Magar culture. Magars from almost all clans in Kaski, a region long dominated by Aryan culture, are influenced to some extent by Hindu rituals and Nepali language and most of them have tried to raise their status through Sanskritisation. Likewise, Nepali language and Hindu religion have a greater influence among the Magars in Palpa and Myagdi though these are the Magar dominated regions. But Magar language is in existence significantly as their mother tongue in Palpa. Religious practices as animism and shamanism are held among the village Magars of Palpa and Myagdi. In the post 1990 era, however, some activists close to the NMA have tended to promote their mother tongue and Buddhism against Nepali language and Hindu religion, in order to follow their central level policy through various levels of activism. The early history of Magar activism was more or less similar to what it is nowadays. "The Magar organisation was influenced more by ex-soldiers than landlords [i.e. compared to the Tharus], but the intention was the same: to raise the status of the group by Sanskritisation..." (Gellner and Karki 2007).

Magar activists play an active role in promoting the interests of the Magar people. They involve themselves in organisations affiliated with the NMA (*Nepal Magar Sangh*- Nepal Magar Association). Most of the Magars in Kaski, mainly in Pokhara, are members of NMA and PS (*Pun Samaj* - Pun Society). The membership of these organisations is strong at the

grass roots level⁴⁰. Those who are interested and are active, become members of the executive body of the NMA and get involved in organisations affiliated with it. There are sixteen such committees within the district. Of these, ten are in Pokhara and the other six are in Lekhanath and other VDCs in Kaski. Only five representatives from each committee can be sent as delegates to the district conference, which is held every three years. These representatives can contest as candidates for any post of the 19 member executive body of the NMA-Kaski. The delegates from grassroots level organisations can try to be elected members of the NMA-Kaski. All executive members including five key posts – Chairman, Vice Chairman, Secretary, Joint Secretary, and Treasurer – are elected every three years. (Thapa Magar, Samir 2060VS).

During the field study, the researcher did not find such regular and active preliminary committees at the grass roots level in Palpa and Myagdi though there were district level body of the Magar organisations in these districts. However, besides its central connection, The NMWA (Nepal Magar Women Association) and the NMSA (Nepal Magar Students' Association) are affiliated with the NMA-Kaski. The NMSA has student units of the Magar in each campus at Pokhara and the NMWA-Kaski itself includes many grassroots Magar women's organisations.

As far as the PS is concerned, it is organised by some activists in Kaski-Pokhara while it is not found in Myagdi and Palpa. There is no grassroots level organisation, although six *Samaj* are supposed to be working in different parts of Pokhara. However, they do not claim to have strong connection with the PS at the district and central level. It seems that these Samaj are more active than the upper level PS. Some Pun Mothers' organisation called *Ama Samuha* is working at the grassroots level⁴¹. It is interesting that the Pun Youth Society (PYS) is an active ethnic organisation established with the initiation of a few young Puns, which, the chairman claims, is not affiliated with the NMA or the PS. It has only 50 members, including some activists who have successfully organised many creative activities for Pun people in Pokhara and abroad⁴².

⁴⁰ According to Mr. Krishna Bahadur Thapa Magar, the chairman of Nepal Magar Sangh, Kaski, there is 7,000 general members of the NMA's committees at the grassroots level and around 35,000 Magar populations in their records of Kaski, while Mrs. Raj Kumari Pun, chairman of the Pun Samaj, said they have 3,000 members. According to her, most of the members in Pun Samaj are those who are migrated from east and south of the Myagdi district, mainly from Shika-Ghara VDC.

⁴¹ Since 1990 many mothers' groups, called *Ama Samuha*, have appeared in various communities of Kaski. Such types of organization are now famous for their ability to control alcohol and drug peddling, promote justice and equality for women, construct small development works, and finance activities through savings schemes and cooperatives.

⁴² The Pun Youth Society was established in 1998 in Pokhara. According to Khiman Pun, the chairman and founder secretary of the Pun Society, Pokhara, well-established and rich Pun youths

Most Magar organisations are concentrated in the urban area., Some activists devoted to these institutions for seeking Magar identity and promoting their community are found in Tansen of Palpa and Beni of the Myagdi. There are many Magar organisations in Kaski, particularly in Pokhara, in order to mobilise the Magars in general for their activism. Most activists are active in Pokhara rather than the hills of Kaski. Magar activists are involved directly and indirectly in NMA-Kaski, NMWA-Kaski, Nepal Magar Intellectual Council-Kaski (ad hoc), NMSA, the Preliminary Committees of NMA-Kaski, the Preliminary Committees of NMW-Kaski, PS-Kaski, PS-Central Ad-hoc Committee-Pokhara, Nepal, Pun Youth Association, Pun Societies at the area level, and Pun Mothers' Groups. In addition to these, some Magar activists in Kaski and even in Myagdi and Palpa are activated through the ethnic or Magar wing of the political parties or the organisation backed by the political parties. Among them, Magar National Liberation Front (MNLF), Nepal Republic Magar Association (NRMA), Nepal Democratic Magar Association (NDMA) are the major political organisations through which political activism is conducted in order to mobilise the Magars in general, in line with the party's respective values.

The early activism was focussed mainly to preserve and promote the Magars' ethnic identity. An attempt has been made to record the experiences and views of these Magar activists. According to the tables mentioned in Appendix-4, the majority of the activists were adult, only a few were very young when the research was conducted. All of them were literate and some had higher education. Mostly, they are either former army men or from families in which there is a tradition of military service. Some other activists who have sound economic background are from peasants followed by traditional ruling family. Activists from army backgrounds and from well-off rural backgrounds have a dominant role in Magar activism. Only a few of them are involved in other occupations. However, the ex-British army men have the leadership and dominant role in NMA-Kaski⁴³, whereas, the effective leaderships come from by the political activists in NMA-Myagdi and NMA-Palpa. The contribution made by the activists from the foreign ex-army background is also significant. Out of 19 members of the executive body of the NMA-Kaski, 15 are ex-army people. Most of the activists had migrated from the surrounding districts of Kaski, particularly Syangja,

are not interested in joining activist organizations. Those activists who are here with PYS, are from middle and lower classes, and mostly are not permanent resident in Pokhara. The PYS has done a lot, including collecting donations for ill Magar people, putting on stage shows and sports contests, and producing an up-to-date record of Pun people in Pokhara. Hence, they were also active in democratic movement of 2006.

⁴³ In comparison to Myagdi and Palpa districts, NMA-Kaski is relatively more active due to the strong leadership of its chairman Captain Krishna Bahadur Thapa Magar and some other colleagues. Almost all of them are the ex-army of the British Gurkhas. They have no livelihood problem and have more time to do their ethnic activities.

Myagdi, Tanahun, Parbat, and Palpa. Mostly, they are from the ex-army background. This is the trend not only in the NMA, but also in the body of Gurungs' activists, the Tamu Dhi, where 40 executive body members out of 46 were formerly employed by the foreign army service. The reasons for ex-army men's high levels of involvement in ethnic organisations are quite clear. Firstly, they have leisure time; secondly, they have a permanent and reliable source of income; and thirdly, they have had broad interactions with various cultures and people while they served in the army. This situation became a factor in inspiring them to think about themselves, their people and culture. Revitalisation of the language, cultural heritage and conducting social and human welfare to the Magars in general as well as constructing their own building are the major activities conducted by the team of NMA-Kaski. Although the NMA-Palpa and Myagdi are dominated by the non-ex-army personalities, who have effective social relationships among the Magars due to their involvement in society as well as their expertise in distinct field, they did not give more time to their ethnic organisation. They got themselves engaged in own business. The ethnic feeling does not seem to be stronger in these districts because they are more guided by politics and they are in their dominant district. Therefore, it seems that the activism of the Magar organizations, in these districts compared to Kaski, is not that strong.

Identity and participation are the most common goals of ethnic activism. The revitalisation of language, religion, and rituals are the basic principles of each ethnic organisation. In addition, ethnic organisations are campaigning for proportional reservations in government and representation in decision-making processes in order to revitalise their communities. Some ethnic organisations seek to go further in defending their identity through language, culture, and religion, and demand local autonomy from the state. As Anne de Sales observes, "the ethnic movements are organised primarily around the three themes of *bhumi*, *bhasa*, *dharma* (land, language, and religion) a phrase which recurs like a ritual formula in the activists' discourse. Protection of the mother tongue, secularization of the state, and to varying degrees, local autonomy are the main issues which came to the fore in the spontaneous days following 1990" (2002 : 337).

5.4.1 Language

The Interim Constitution of Nepal 2007 has recognised Nepal as 'the nation having multiethnic, multilingual, multi-religious and multicultural characteristics'. Likewise, Article five of the constitution has declared, 'all the languages spoken as the mother tongues in Nepal are the languages of the nation' (Interim Constitution 2007). These are significant achievements in ethnic activism that are gained through the latest popular movement-*Janandolan* II. The National Population Census 2001 identified 92 mother tongues and dialects in Nepal; however, the Magar language is not as widespread as some of the other

minor languages. According to the 1991 census, only 40 per cent of Magars speak their language. In the 2001 census, Magar language speakers are reported to have increased to 47 per cent. The NMA at the central level had campaigned and published a pamphlet among their support communities appealing to Magars to state 'Magar' as their language during the census period⁴⁴. Therefore, NMA instructed its units to follow their central policy for language and religion. NMA-Kaski had also launched the same campaign in Kaski through Magar activists. But their movement cannot be said to have been a roaring success⁴⁵. The formal governmental records show, however, that the increase in the number of Magar speakers in the 2001 census is due to the language revitalisation campaign carried out by Magar activists in Kaski.

Although speakers of Magar and Gurung increased in official records through language campaigning, the view of activists from both ethnic groups in Kaski is that the number of speakers is lower than the official records represent. Even the majority of the Magar activists do not speak the Magar language. The young generations of Magars and Gurungs are gradually becoming ignorant of their mother tongue. Most of them either do not understand it, or if they understand, they are unable to reply (Baral 2008). Hence, a research study proves that "the younger generations use only or predominantly Nepali, rather than the ethnic language of their parents or grandparents" (Gellner and Karki 2007 : 377). Nevertheless, some Magars have knowledge of their mother tongue and they are trying to use it in practice. For their fluency in speech, language orientations classes are conducted by the NMA-Kaski. NMA-Kaski has been providing such classes with books and audio materials. Hence, the young activists particularly through NMSA have been conducting such classes from time to time among the Magar students in different campuses of Kaski and Myagdi. Likewise, the NMA Preliminary committees have crucial role in performing and practicing their language among the Magar communities.

The environment and the society play a key role in determining the use of the mother tongue. People who have migrated from homogeneous communities to heterogeneous

⁴⁴ The NMA had also campaigned among Magar activists and Magar people to report their religion as 'Buddhist' with the layout of collection of working paper that was presented in the seminar on '*Janaganana Janachetana Rastriya Prashikshana Shiwir*' (for details see *Karyapatraharuko Sangalo*, 2058: NMA).

⁴⁵ In his experience while researcher visited Chilimdanda, Kaskikot VDC in 2005, he found that there were some Magar women who spoke the Magar language very well. But there is not a single Magar speaker recorded for this VDC in the 2001 census (Baral 2008). On the other hand, the activists close to the NMA have not fully succeeded in writing Magars as Magar speaker in Census period in compare to Magar population and Magar speaker in this census in many parts of Kaski district (see in Appendix 1). Besides these, almost all clans of the Magars from hills (VDCs) have written Magar with adding their surnames in voter list for their ethnic identity while very few Magars followed such tendency in Pokhara city.

modern society find it very difficult to survive using only their mother tongue. Parents and children gradually begin to use another, dominating language, mainly Nepali, followed by English, due to the impact of modernisation and globalisation in urban areas. Consequently, the ethnic languages in the middle hills, particularly the Magar language in urban areas, are increasingly in crisis. Most Magar activists, who are from ex-army background, might have spoken the Magar language when they were children. During the years of their employment, they used only Nepali to communicate with other Nepali people and have settled in urban, heterogeneous society since their retirement. That's why most of the Magars today have forgotten their language, which is more or less a trend represented in the Gurung community as well. However, the revival of Magar language, waged by the NMA in different parts of Kaski, has made some progress; a few Magars have now learned to speak the Magar language. As lamented by Dr. Baral Magar (2005, 2007) the director of this programme, "most of the activists and leaders themselves are not interested in getting involved in such classes". The researcher got an opportunity to observe the formal official sessions and mass meetings where not even a single Magar activist was found to speak a single sentence in their mother tongue. It is also interesting to note that very few of the activists with whom the researcher spoke have given a Magar name to his or her children. Most of the activists of the NMA have not given their children names in the Magar language. Even former general secretary of the NMA has not given the Magar names to his kids though he said that he proposed in their organisation that each activist should give the Magar name to their children for showing love and respect to the Magar language. Thus, the language revitalisation campaign remains at the level of pioneering a slogan in the mouth of Magar activists and NMA leaders. Therefore, the slogan for using mother tongue seems just a political aspect for instrumentalism. Hence, Minami (2005) said it has political meaning for ethnic movements in Nepal rather than disseminating and using the mother tongue themselves in practice.

Most of the younger Magar activists argue that they are proud of their language as part of their identity, but they do not see any relevance in learning the Magar language when there are no such schools or publications in their language. Moreover, they do not see any application of their mother tongue in their career development. They suggest that NMA and their activists should focus their mind on job opportunities, skill-development training programmes, study loan programmes etc for the benefit of Magar youths. The young activists further stress that revitalisation of the language of Magars needs the establishment of schools in Magar tongue speaking areas and extensive communication using Magar language among and between

Magars (Baral, 2005; 2008). It seems that, they are much worried for the future career in a modern and complicated society rather than for the application of their language and culture. This is quite near to the experience of de Sales writing of a Kham Magar village in the western hills:

“...people did not bother much about defending their language, which they all speak anyway, or about having a script. They did not worry about being ‘pure’ Magars either. They worried more about having good schools for their children, health posts, and some opportunities for making cash” (2003: 240).

In comparison among the three districts, i.e. Kaski, Palpa and Myagdi, language revitalising activities through the NMA are seen more active in Kaski than other two districts. Palpa is the district where most of the Magars in its eastern part use their mother tongue. But in its western part Magars do not know their native language and they are less densely populated in comparison with eastern areas. However, many activists at the local level in the place are eager to learn their language. The NMA–Palpa is not much worried about their language classes thinking that they are almost well-known to their native tongue. While, in Myagdi although 42 percent Magar are settled but large numbers of the Magar population do not speak their mother tongue. A few older people have some knowledge about the Athar Magaranti as Kham language in the west and north of the district. Likewise, some activists in Beni Bazaar, the headquarters of the district, have some knowledge about their mother tongue. But this became possible only when they took the language classes conducted by NMA and NMSA. However, relatively the NMA Kaski is more active in comparison with other districts in relation to their language activism for promoting their ethnic identities.

If we compare the Magar with the Gurung of Kaski with regard to language, the report of the 2001-census has recorded that nearly 82% of the Gurung speak their ethnic language while only 27% Magars of Kaski speak their mother tongue⁴⁶. This is because the Tamu Dhi-Kaski has compelled all its members to speak Gurung at their meetings (Baral 2008) while this kind of tendency is not found in the Magar organisations due to the fact that the Magar activists are not much familiar with their mother tongue. According to the 1991 census, 40% of Magars speak their language. But Magar language speakers have increased to 47% in the 2001 census. The NMA, at the central level, campaigned and published a pamphlet for their communities appealing to Magars to write their language as Magar during the census period. NMA, Kaski, and Myagdi also launched the same campaign in Kaski and Myagdi districts through Magar activists. In Myagdi, they have had some success in convincing

⁴⁶ Besides, this formal report, the data that obtained from the field has also proved that majority of the Magars do not know about their mother tongue. Some discoursing on their ethnic language have also made in chapter - two.

people to define their mother tongue as ‘Magar’ in the census report, but their campaign was less successful in Kaski. It is because as the table: 4-5 shows, that the majority of the Magars in Kaski do not know their mother tongue. Besides this, there is no Magar feeling among the Magars in urban centers; whereas most of the Magars from rural parts write the Magar with their clans’ title in the Kaski district. Due to this visible trend, it was easy enough to sort out the Magar population out of the voter list and choose among them the required number of respondents for the researcher. Many complications occurred with this process in the urban areas due to the absence of the Magar title to their sur-names. The same problem however was not faced in Palpa and Myagdi, traditionally Magar dominated districts. However, the following table shows the native Magar speaker and non speaker in Kaski, Myagdi and Palpa districts.

Table No. 5.5
Do you speak your mother tongue? (Cross tabulation-Village/city)

	Voters				Activists			
	Yes	No	A little bit	Total	Yes	No	A little bit	Total
Kaski District	18 18.0	71 71.0%	11 11.0%	100 100.0%	9 36.0%	12 48.0%	4 16.0%	25 100.0%
Lumle		21 91.3%	2 8.7%	23 100.0%	1 25.0%	3 75.0%		4 100.0%
Nirmal Pokhari	9 40.9%	5 22.7%	8 36.4%	22 100.0%	1 33.3%	2 66.7%		3 100.0%
Pokhara	9 16.4%	45 81.8%	1 1.8%	55 100.0%	7 38.9%	7 38.9%	4 22.2%	18 100.0%
Myagdi District	1 1.0%	95 95.0%	4 4.0%	100 100.0%		15 60.0%	10 40.0%	25 100.0%
Baranja		38 90.5%	4 9.5%	42 100.0%		3 60.0%	2 40.0%	5 100.0%
Beni Bazar	1 20.0%	4 80.0%		5 100.0%		3 27.3%	8 72.7%	11 100.0%
Histan		53 100.0%		53 100.0%		9 100.0%		9 100.0%
Palpa District	72 72.0%	24 24.0%	4 4.0%	100 100.0%	12 48.0%	8 32.0%	5 20.0%	25 100.0%
Pipal Danda	69 93.2%	3 4.1%	2 2.7%	74 100.0%	6 100.0%			6 100.0%
Somadi		21 100.0%		21 100.0%		4 100.0%		4 100.0%
Tansen	3 60.0%		2 40.0%	5 100.0%	6 40.0%	4 26.7%	5 33.3%	15 100.0%
Total	91 30.3%	190 63.3%	19 6.3%	300 100.0%	21 28.0%	35 46.7%	19 25.3%	75 100.0%

Source: Field Survey, 2006.

According to table no. 5.5, the majority of the Magar voters (around 72 percent) in Palpa district speak their mother tongue very well, followed by 4 percent Magars who

know a little bit. Out of the total respondents, 24 percent state that they do not know their mother tongue. Similarly, the trend is found among the activists too. Those Magars who do not know about their language are almost all respondents from the western parts of Palpa, where there is no trend to use their language. Some activists were quite interested in hearing that the Magar language is available in Audio and Text forms. It seems that there are two reasons for not using the mother tongue. First, almost all the Magars in the western part of Palpa district are in the minority and are settled heterogeneously and second, most of the Magars in these places have migrated from west Nepal. Therefore, most of the Magars in these areas are obliged to use Nepali. It seems that Palpa, particularly in its eastern part, the Magars are densely settled. Due to their dense and indigenous population, the culture and way of life over here significantly prevail over the aboriginal Magar community. Among the research study areas, only in Pipaldanda of Palpa do almost all Magar speak their mother tongue, some in Nirmal Pokhari also use it. So far in the urban areas, around 50 percent of Magars speak their native tongue as migrated strata from mother tongue dominated areas. And a few try to speak it because of the language revitalisation process campaigned by Magar organisations in the urban sector.

As per table no. 5.5, most of the Magars, whether activists, or commoners do not speak their native language in Kaski and Myagdi districts. Although, activists succeeded in writing Magar as their mother tongue in the census report in many VDCs of the district, actually they do not know the Magar tongue. For instance, through the survey study no Magar in the Histan VDC said he or she knows the Magar tongue. Likewise, most of the Magar voters in the Baranja VDC and Beni Bazar stated that they do not know the Magar language. Table no. 5.5 also refers that 90.5 percent of voters followed by the 60 percent of activists in Baranja VDC do not speak their language. Only 9.4 percent of voters and 40 percent of activists stated that they know some words of Kham Magar language. In Beni Bazar, 80 percent of general people followed by 27 percent of activists do not know their mother tongue. Most of the Magars expressed through their interview that they could not use the Magar language in their family or among their fellow members because they do not know it. Nevertheless, in Kaski and Pokhara the activists have raised awareness of their language through participation in Magar language-orientation programmes initiated by NMA and NMSA. The same trends are found in the case of Beni Bazaar of Myagdi. Those who migrated from native speaking villages use their language and a few of them know some words of the Magar while the majority of Magars (71 percent) in Kaski have no idea about the Magar tongue. Although, Magars in this district use Nepali more than their mother tongue, the governmental records show that

the number of Magar speakers increased in the 2001 census in contrast to the previous censuses because of the language revitalisation campaign carried out by Magar activists in Kaski. The other reason for this increase is migration from Magar speaking districts such as Syangja, Tanahun, and Palpa during the 1990s (Baral 2008).

Indeed, the majority of Magar activists do not speak the Magar language. Only a few young Magar activists are eager to define themselves as Magar speakers but most of them do not know or understand the Magar language. Hence, a research study proves that the younger generations use only or predominantly Nepali rather than the ethnic language of their own (Gellner and Karki, 2007). The environment and society play a key role in using and shaping the mother tongue. It is very difficult to survive with only their mother tongue if people migrate from a homogeneous community to heterogeneous modern society. Parents and children gradually merge into other dominating languages, mainly Nepali and then English. Thus, ethnic language is in a state of crisis in the middle hills, particularly the Magar language in urban areas.

The government census doesn't give an accurate picture of the Magar language. Magar speakers have increased in number due to ethnic activism during the census period. Although, there are no more Magar speakers in many villages like Devasthan, Darvang, Shikha of Myagdi district, the census reports have nevertheless shown their large number in these places (Baral, 2060BS). Besides Kaski district, the researcher found irrelevant statistic reports in Histan and Baranja VDC of Myagdi district. In Histan village, no one in his survey study said that they knew the Magar tongue, but in the report of 2001 census it has been clearly shown that there are huge numbers of Magar speakers (nearly 90 percent) in this village. So many irrelevant facts have also been found during field study in many villages of Kaski and Palpa districts. In this respect, it may be enough to generalise the situation of the whole Magar population and native speaker through-out the country. These are the feedbacks for Magar activism to review their state of identity and also their activism in order to revitalise Magar language among the Magar in general.

Two reasons in particular explain why the Magar tongue is not spoken as the native language among the Magars in the Myagdi and Kaski districts. First, due to the deprivation and suppression of the Malla ruler (King of Prabat petty principality in Middle age of political History in northern Magar particularly, in Myagdi), Magars stopped speaking their language because of the imposition of the Khas language and threats made by the ruler. Therefore, there was no tendency to use their language and gradually, generation to generation, they forgot it. Second, in urban areas Magar

people do not use their language due to urbanisation, modernization and globalization, because their language does not assist in such processes in building their future career. Neither Magar Organisations nor government has any sustainable or realistic policies and programmes for revitalizing the Magar language among the Magar population. It was only out of the political interest that they showed the strength of their mother tongue officially as an ethnic group during the census period. However, the young activists further stress that if the Magar *sangh* wants to revitalise Magar language, it would be worthwhile to introduce the courses in schools teaching in the Magar tongue and use Magar language at least initially among Magar activists and their families. It would be practicable if the activists try to afford to introduce the Magar language through the school and local government in their dominate villages.

5.4.2 Religion and Rituals

There has been a debate among activists about religion and ritual issues since the inception of the NMA. Most of the ethnic organisations in Nepal had demanded ‘a secular and multi-ethnic state’ for long. They argued that Hinduism, the state religion, was based on the caste system ignoring the religions of the various ethnic (*janajati*) groups. The former constitution (1990) stated that the king of Nepal must be ‘an adherent of Aryan culture and the Hindu religion’. Finally, along with addressing the demand of the secular state from the activists, particularly ethnic organisations, the Interim Constitution of Nepal 2007 has declared Nepal as a secular state. It was one of the significant achievements of *Janandolan II*.

Religion is a major discourse among the Magar activists from the central to the local level. During the last census some Magar leaders have tried to prove that their religion is Buddhism (*Karyapatrako Sangalo* 2058BS). Most of the activists at local level affiliated with the NMA are officially Buddhist, but some of them did not hesitate to admit that in reality they are Hindu, and some said that their religion is Shamanist and Animist. Although, Magar activists are not unanimous on religious matters but they carry out a champion for the revival of their original beliefs and culture. The religious conflict among the activists is more prominent in Kaski rather than in Palpa and Myagdi districts. In Myagdi, the researcher did not find any controversial arguments towards religion. The activists, from both urban and rural areas, are in favour of Shamanism-Animism under the Hindu inclination as against Kaski and Palpa. In case of Palpa district, the activists in the Tansen bazaar were found more to be the Buddhist, but in the villages both activists and the commoners were found belonging to the Hindu religion. The religion of the Magars was derived

from location and nature of society through Sanskritising and Hinduising by ruling castes and classes. Generally, it seems that Magars not only from the Barha Magarant but from Athara (Kham) Magarant region are also influenced by Hindu religion (Thapa, et. al 2056). Moreover, the ritual and religious life of the people in the rural parts and villages are almost guided by the Hindu philosophy. Terje Oestigaard has rightly said that “originally, the Magar religion was animistic, but generally the Magars have been influenced by Hinduism and Brahmanism through the ages” (1999 : 51). Similarly, following table also states that Magar at local level are influenced by Hindu religion.

Table No. 5.6
Which Religion do you believe?

		Voters					Activists					
		Hindu	Buddha	Shamanism	Christian	Total	Hindu	Buddha	Shamanism	Christian	Nastik	Total
Place of residence	Rural	187	18	29	1	235	18	3	9	1		31
	Urban	57	5	3		65	19	13	10		2	44
Age Group	18-30	61	5	6	1	73	6		2			8
	31-45	76	10	11		97	15	6	9	1	1	32
	46-60	67	6	6		79	10	6	5		1	22
	Above 60	40	2	9		51	6	4	3			13
Level of education	Illiterate	59	3	7		69						
	Literate	84	5	15		104	13	6	5	1		25
	High School	73	8	6	1	88	11	5	7		1	24
	Campus	27	7	3		37	12	5	7			24
	University	1		1		2	1				1	2
Gender	Male	110	13	18	1	142	26	12	16	1	2	57
	Female	134	10	14		158	11	4	3			18
District	Kaski	87	8	5		100	13	7	4		1	25
	Myagdi	72	7	20	1	100	10	5	8	1	1	25
	Palpa	85	8	7		100	14	4	7			25
Total		244	23	32	1	300	37	16	19	1	2	75

Source: Field Survey, 2006.

According to table no. 5.6, Hindu is the major religion among the Magars in general. Among the respondents, 87 percent in Kaski, 85 percent in Palpa and 72 percent in Myagdi respectively state that they are Hindu. These findings are close to the data of Census report. The 2001 Census report (CBS 2003) deals that 82 percent in Kaski, 88 percent in Palpa and 74 percent in Myagdi follow Hindu religion. The above table also states that 20 percent Magars of Myagdi follow animism and shamanism followed by 7 percent in Palpa and 5 percent in Kaski respectively, while Buddhism is followed by 8 percent in each of Kaski and Palpa and 7 percent in Myagdi districts. In proportion to the voters' inclination toward religion in these places, it seems that the percent of activists inclined to Hinduism is less and to Buddhism and Shamanism is more. However, the data reveals that the Magar activism was more effective in writing Buddhism as the Magar religion in Kaski rather than in Myagdi and Palpa.

Some Magar ethnic leaders and activists, particularly during the 2001 census, tried to prove through activism that their religion is Buddhism⁴⁷, but in fact, it seems that Magars are not unanimous on religious matters. Table no. 5.6 (also Appendix 4 and 5) presents that, although activists are less Hindu in comparison to the Magar in general, both are much influenced by the Hindu rituals than other that have been practiced for many centuries as a way of life. Most of the activists in urban centers said that they are Buddhists; whereas most of the activists in rural parts said that they are Hindu. Most of the activists in Kaski are officially Buddhist but they did not hesitate to admit that in reality they are Hindu (Baral 2008). In most of the activities initiated by the NMA and NEFIN in the capital and other urban centers, their leaders are against Hinduism but could not prescribe any other religious performances, or Buddhism either. One interesting case that the researcher discovered during his field study was that of an activist who was around 60 years old, in one village, called Nirmal Pokhari of Kaski. The activist said he is a follower of Buddhism, as did most of the activists during the census period, and then subsequently declared himself a Magar priest (Bhusal). When the researcher met him on the day of *Nagpanchami*, one of the Hindu religious worshipping days, he was busy offering the *Puja* in many Hindu houses in his village. He told this researcher that he had been worshipping the god of *Nag* and other Hindu traditional ritual from past and, since there is no other person to perform the religious activities and most of the villagers wanted him to be the priest for this purpose. Whilst, the researcher reminded him that if he was Buddhist then he said that he was a Buddhist and also a Bhusal, the Magar priest. It seems that he is an example of unorthodox Magar in

⁴⁷ The NMA also campaigned throughout the country among Magar activists and Magar people to return their religion to 'Buddhist' through collecting of working papers that were presented in the seminar on 'Janaganama Janachetana Rastriya Prashikshana Shiwir' (for details, see *Karyapatraharuko Sangalo*, 2058: NMA).

religious matter. There are many other such examples of Magar activists behaving like this in their religious way of life.

Some sorts of differences are also found among Magars in Pokhara, Kaski. Most of the activists who are the northern Magars and are associated with the Pun Society are mostly Hindu. They perform many rituals related to Hindu Deities and 13 days death ritual adopting the Brahmin priest. In contrast, some Magars from south spend only 3-5 days on such rituals. It is for this reason that the northern Magars are supposed to be superior from those of the south. But it could not be generalised, because what the researcher observed in the rituals and religious activities in some villages of northern part contrasted with the rituals performed in Pokhara. In Histan Mandali of the Myagdi, where almost all are Magars and there was not any other ethnic or caste group, Magars performed only 3 days death rituals while it could be extended for 5 or 7 days, they waited for the arrival of their Kutumba in the funeral house, which was essential for being pure. Moreover, they did not have any other religious activities, but worship only ghosts and evil spirits and other mysterious symbols to protect their animals, plants, crops, and themselves. Same type of rituals is performed in the indigenous societies of the southern Magars.

The Magars in the south are also influenced by Hindu religion in their lifestyle. Although some of them do not use a Brahmin priest in their wedding ceremony, they need a Brahman priest in their death ritual, which goes on for 13 days. Hence, in the west part of the Palpa and in Kaski most of their rituals completely depend on Hindu religion. Not only this, whatever cultural activities (i.e. *Sorathi*, *Ghatu*, *Thulo Nach* etc.) they perform; they go on dancing in their own style but to a certain extent most lyrics are derived from Hindu mythology. Therefore, it seems that whether Magars from southern or northern as Thapa, Rana, Aale or Pun and others are influenced by Hindu religion and culture. However, religious performances are the traditional rituals that may differ from one village to other, one clan to other or one group to other. So far a debate on religious issue in Pokhara seems more political between two contesting ethnic organisations, PS Vs NMA.

Since a greater number of Magar people are migrating in the urban areas, some Magars like to say that they are Buddhists and some others want to give preferences to their earlier ritual practices; animism and shamanism. But majority of Magars still settle in villages where their organisational activities are rarely conducted. They are found more influenced by Hindu culture and religion. A study has also proved that the Magars in villages are 'more' Hindu than those residents in urban areas (Purja, 2004; Baral, 2060VS). Two reasons seem to be adopting Hindu religion among the

Magar societies. First, with interaction and interdependence of the Magar society with Hindu society, Magars adopted some sort of Hindu culture and religion through cross cultural practices. Second, some Hindu rituals have gradually penetrated their earlier religious practices through elites who were close to the traditional state power. On the contrary, some activists who are associated with the NMA and NEFEN claimed that their religion is Buddhist. But Magars neither follow wholly Hindu rituals nor Buddhist ones. They generally worship natural powers, ghosts, and their forefathers (Baral Magar, 2005). Different literatures reveal that the Pun Magars have also performed more or less such practices through their religious and cultural performances in Myagdi (IHC 1998, Pahare Pun Magar 2058VS). By going deep into the root of their tradition, it is clear that the Magars are neither Hindu nor Buddhist; they are originally animists and shamanists.

Magars in the hills of Kaski are much more under Hindu influence compared to Magar migrants in Pokhara from Syangja, Tanahun, and Palpa districts. In Pokhara city, most of the Pun activists who are affiliated with PS from Myagdi are followers of Hindu religion and in comparison with them, the activists of Thapa-Rana from the south are found to be 'less' Hindu. Hence, some Pun activists have used a 'sacred (holly) thread' (*Janai*) as being pure Hindu which is traditionally used by high caste hill group and some high caste Newar ethnic group in Hindu society. In Pokhara, some Magar activists from south have begun to avoid meat and alcohol in death ritual which has been traditionally practiced since ages. Some Magars including activists at Ram Bazaar NMA-preliminary committee's office said to the researcher that 'those are the bad trends with which we 'Magars' have been affiliated for a while and they need to be reformed'. They further said that 'it looks inhuman and odd using alcohol and meat in such mourning days. If we celebrate with drinks and sacrifice animals, it seems unfavourable and unnatural for such events'. However, they wanted to reform some of their traditional practices. Due to the cross-cultural interactions, it is the natural outcome in a heterogeneous society. Some ethnic groups avoid their earlier practices and adopt some other practices due to Sanskritisation. Whereas, those who oppose these reforms stated that these are the ethnic practices. Using alcohol is natural for the people of Magar origin. But on the other side, those who favoured to reform some of these practices forwarded that they had been backward due to their involvement in such traditional exercises. They further said that, 'If we are trying to be more civilised and recognised for the positive culture instead of the negative practices, then 'what is wrong'. Hence, in their views they are concerned more with their ethnic and political rights along with reforming themselves through activism on

one hand, and on the other, respecting social harmony by assimilating their values along with distinct ethnic identity in urban heterogeneous society.

In general, Magars who are under the influence of Aryan culture have adopted the *kutumba* system in their religious rituals. Their rituals are customs based on religious beliefs. Kutumba system is also highly respectable in the traditional Hindu society, who is supposedly necessary in their religious performances. But the Magar activists themselves are in a dilemma whether to practice them or not. Magar activists disagree about whom they should employ to perform ritual ceremonies. It is because some of them employ Brahmin priests, others Magar adopt Bhusal priests, some employ their *Kutumba*, and others again make use of both Brahmin priests and *Kutumba*. Some Magar from both sides as Pun and others also use *Dhami-Jhakri* in their religious and ritual performances. Through the observations of the researcher from his earlier life to now, he found that the traditional society where people have been settling since indigenously, almost all, irrespective of any caste or ethnicity, believe in natural mysterious and ghosts. He has noticed that the earlier generations with in his family and his neighbour have followed the Shamanism and Animism.

Dr. Keshar Jung Baral Magar in his interview noted ‘originally Magars did not have any priesthood or Lama system as Hindu or Buddha rituals do respectively; rather they have *Shasurali-Kutumba* or *Dhami-Jhankri* system in the performance of rituals’. F.B. Hamilton also remarked that before integrating Rajput chiefs and Brahmin priests they “had priests of their own tribe called Damis, and seemed to have worshipped chiefly ghosts” (Hamilton, 1971 : 26). However, the student and intellectual wing of the NMA believe that religious choice is a personal right, and that neither the state, nor any other institution should impose itself on them in this matter. A 60 year old Magar activist and Chairman of Preliminary Committee, NMA-Kaski, told the researcher that his family and his relatives have been adopting Hindu religion and rituals for a long time. Now the Magar Sangh and its leaders instructed them to adopt Buddhism, but they do not know how and why to follow it in their practical life. He further said that many years ago, when he was a child and was in his original village, he had seen *Jhakri* who used to worship natural things and *bhut-pret* (ghosts). He stressed that in Kaski-Pokhara some Magars follow Brahmin priests, some follow *Kutumba*, and other follow *Bhusal* in their rituals. Therefore, he argued, ‘before prescribing any religion from above, there should be more studies done on the various Magar communities and that conclusions should be made from the bottom up’. Moreover, there is an example of the Magar leader as how to exploit the general Magars’ sentiment on religion and culture through activism (Baral, 2008).

The researcher's observations in Pipal Danda VDC, Palpa, tend to support Dr. Baral's opinion. He witnessed the marriage ceremony there. He found that whole rites of performing the marriage ceremony were based on the *Sasurali-Kutumba* system, i.e. all the ritual roles were performed by affine (*sasurali*) and relatives (*kutumba*). But the researcher was confused when he observed a Magar death ritual where a Brahmin priest conducted the ritual on the one hand and a large amount of alcohol being offered along with sacrificing the black pork on the other. This shows that the Magars, rather than preserving their original culture, are adopting mixed forms consisting of Hindu rituals and Shamanist-Animist practices. Researcher experienced such religious activities not only in Palpa and Kaski but also in Myagdi. In Histan of Myagdi district, they did not call the Brahmin or Bhusal priest; the 'Jhankri' (Shaman) performed the death ritual, who has significant role in their religious and other ritual practices. Sisters and Shaman offered mustard oil to make holy and pure, and neighbours and relatives helped along providing foods and drinks for all guests. Likewise, the researcher found that some Shaman in Baranja were active in performing the worshipping of ghost and deities though the procedure were much more similar with the practices of high caste hill group. The researcher was surprised when he observed that the Magar and the Brahmin priests together offered ownership to their village deities publicly. In this village both Magar and Brahmin culture were overlapped and interfaced with each other. However, the impression he had was that Shamanism and Animism appear to be an earlier form of Magar culture and have a major role in their daily life, and then Hindu religion gradually influenced their death rituals and other culture.

However, many Magars (a large numbers of Puns and a few numbers of Thapa, Rana and Ale) have lost their language and have imitated Hindu religion. But, they have not become fully absorbed into Hinduism. It is because, some Magars are still following shamanism and animism manners and a few of them are trying to follow Buddhism as some NMA's activists think that it is the religion of their own. Therefore, a religious organisation called *Nepal Magar Baudhdha Sewa Samaj* (Nepal Magar Buddhist Service Society) is also activated among the Magars that published the book, *Buddhist Ritual System* in order to disseminate the ritual performing style for Buddhists Magar (see in detail, NMBSS 2060VS). However, the activism of NMA in religion perspective was limited only to 2001-Census period for increasing the data record officially and proving that Magars are also Buddhists without practicing it in their real life.

Through their activism, the NMA decided to use a Magar priest instead of a Hindu Brahmin in their religious rituals in the early 1990s. In Kaski, a Magar activist and a *Bhusal* (Magar priest), adopted Magar *karmakanda* (life-cycle rituals) after joining the NMA in 1994. According to Yam Bahadur Thapa Magar, who claimed himself as the first *Bhusal* in Kaski, there were a few *Bhusal* performing the ritual and religious performances in the Magar life. These *Bhusals* perform ritual ceremonies with moderation from Hindu religion, but have no idea about Buddhist procedures. According to Thapa Magar, the ritual ceremonies are close to what a Brahmin priest does in a Magar community but it is not lengthy and costly. He further states that the major thrust of Magar *karmakanda* is to replace the Brahmin priest by a *Bhusal*. Whereas Baral Magar, an advisor of NMA, said in his interviews that this is just a distortion of Hindu rituals in the name of replacing the Brahmin priest. His opinion is that Magars have their own original ritual procedures based on animism and shamanism. He argues that the NMA and Magar activists in general should help to bring these indigenous ritual systems to light and take them to the Magar communities that have already lost it. Likewise, the view of the Bom Kumari Budha, a senior activist from Athar Magarant region, is that first the Magars were animists and shamanists, later they contacted with Buddhism and finally Magars are influenced by Hindu religion (Karyapatra ko Sangalo 2058VS). However, the religious activism seems more instrumental in seeking political benefit rather than promoting their primordial ethnic identity. Moreover, following two judgments delivered by Kramer and Minami are very close to this statement:

“...the religious base of most ethnic cultures is not Buddhism but some kind of animism or shamanism which, within many ethnic cultures of the Pahad region, has been overlapped by Buddhist influences with different intensity. Other ethnic groups, because of their long running contacts to neighbouring Hindu castes, have adopted a number of Hindu values and practices. Most of the ethnic organisations declared during the 2001 Census period that their religion is Buddhism. Not animist practices but Buddhism can provide an important counterbalance when entering into discussions with the state Hinduism of the ruling elite (Kramer 2003 : 299)”.

...religion are given very political meaning in Nepal and used for ethnic movements. The Buddhism movement by the Magars is limited to the level of discourse and no practical guidance for having Buddhism belief is presented to the people. This is because the Buddhism is only utilized as means in this movement whose real goal is to plant anti-Bahunism in the mind of Magars. ...For the villagers who have no knowledge of Buddhism, the declaration of the Buddhism faith by the NMA was too foreign (Minami, 2005). "

During the 2001 census, Magar activism regarding language and religion, with the aim to increase ethnic data, was conducted at the local level by their ethnic organisations. So far as the question of language is concerned, they had been

successful in persuading people to write 'Magar' for their ethnic mother tongue, despite their ignorance of their dialect. In the case of religion, it seems that they have been less successful. It is because, most of their religious activists are conducted under the Hindu ritual and shamanism, and therefore, activists themselves are not convinced that their religion is Buddhism. According to some officials from the NMA-Kaski and Palpa, in order to campaign for Buddhism, some efforts were done in urban centers than in villages where they had no any influence. Hence, the village people believed that the religious activisms conducted by the leaders are mainly for their own benefits rather than empowering the Magar community in reality (Baral, 2008). According to Lakshaman Khoraja Pun, the immediate secretary of the NMA-Myagdi when they were campaigning *Buddha Dharma* as their religion as per the instruction of central body of the NMA in the rural parts, villagers offended them and they cut short their campaign and came back to the district headquarter. As previously mentioned, almost all Magars are influenced by Hinduism in their earlier practices of shamanism and animism; thus they did not adopt Buddhism immediately in their day to day life as activists expected. He further said it would be more valuable if NMA had drawn conclusions regarding religion from the survey and observation of religious and cultural practices in major Magar pastorals. The bottom up approach is better than instructing and imposing from top to down approach.

The researcher observed that there was no priest in Magars' wedding ceremony in Pipladanda of Palpa. Likewise, he did not find any priesthood in the death ritual in Histan of Myagdi district. Moreover, they did not have any other religious activities, but worship only ghosts and evil spirits and other mysterious symbols with adopting *Jhankri* or *Kutumba* in order to protect their animals, plants, crops, and themselves. Likewise, Magars in the south are much more influenced by Hindu religion as they adopted a Brahmin priest in their death ritual. They sacrificed a black pig and produced a big volume of home made alcohol which indicated that they still had not given up their earlier practices. Nevertheless, they have some natural animist and shamanist practices that are also guided by Hindu religion. The Common arguments both from intellectual activists and voters in general are that they substantially prefer Magaranti as their religion for covering all practices and for giving up all religious illusions. It is best expressed by the view of Baral Magar, who has asserted that, "Magars are neither Hindu nor Buddhist, they are animists and shamanists, and therefore, religion of Magars should be addressed as *Magrant* religion" (2063VS : 50; 2062; 2060). The researcher did not find any objection from the activists towards the approach whether it was in formal programme or informal talking. It seems that the Magars may write their religion as 'Magarant' in the forthcoming census through

their activism as the 'Kirant' religion stated by the Rai and Limbu ethnic groups in the last census-2001. However, the Hindu religion has its influence over their shamanism and animism as tribal rituals. There are enough signs and symbols of natural rites handed down by their ancestors. The rituals and customs are based on religious beliefs that are transferred from generation to generation.

The discussion over the religion of Magars can be summarised as briefly as follows:

- i. Religious matter is much more debatable among the activists of Magars than it is commonly held. Three religions are found in the practices of Magars from various parts in western region, they are 1, Hindu, 2, Buddha, and 3, Animism and Shamanism.
- ii. Despite the religious controversy as Buddhism vs Hinduism that was initiated by the Magar ethnic activists, particularly in the Census period, most of the Magars at the grass root were found Hindus. Natural worshippers are the second most common. Some are inclined towards Christianity, whereas some other do not follow any religion. However, inclinations towards Buddhism are found more among activists and urban centers rather than general voters and rural parts.
- iii. It seems that their original religion is animism and shamanism, but having been influenced by the Hindu ruling classes for many centuries, Hinduism has had a big impact upon their original practices. Magar activists, however, as directed by NEFIN and NMA, tried to shift towards Buddhism as opposed to Hinduism. It is supposed that Buddhism is relatively stronger and more globally recognised than their older ritual practices such as Animism and Shamanism. (IV) The Common arguments both from intellectual activists and voters in general are that they substantially prefer *Magaranti* as their religion for covering all practices and for giving up all religious illusions. However, Magars in general are neither Hindu, nor Buddhist; moreover they believe in natural worshiping. Therefore, the religion of Magar is Magaranti Dharma.

5.4.3 Some Other Reformative Activism

Like a majority of people from various ethnic groups, Magars have also a habit of drinking homemade alcohols. Drinking alcohol and gambling and affect people's health negatively and erode their social prestige as well as economic status. Sometime it is the cause for crime. Some Magar activists think that over-drinking is a bad trend. Therefore, it should be controlled and limited, whereas others think that it strengthens the ethnic identity and culture of the Magars. During the field study, the researcher observed that majority of the Magars were found following this trend. He noticed many stories of activism in terms of anti-alcohol campaigns in several villages,

particularly initiated by the educated Magar youths and Maoist Magar activists. Including many other rural villages, in Baranja, Histan and Pipal Danda, anti-alcohol activisms were launched. But the activists could not limit this process. There are some reasons for continuing these trends. Researcher wanted to be clear and asked the people there who liked to drink alcohol and those who had participated in the anti-alcohol campaign. On the basis of these talks, the researcher has reached the conclusion: First, it is a regular habit of old generations; they spend most of their time having it and one can not expect them to leave within a moment. Second, there is no alternative business to replace alcohol production; some have this occupation for maintaining their families. Hence, he noticed in Baranja of the Myagdi and Histan village that during the anti-alcohol campaigns, the Maoists started a campaign to destroy the utensils that were used to produce alcohol pots after having had the alcohol. Therefore, ordinary Magars got irritated and continued to produce and consume alcohol as their usual business. Likewise, in Histan the Women's Group launched such activism but it was not successful, as some of the women who launched the programme were the same women who produced alcohol in their own homes.

For the reason of drinking more alcohol, the senior activist of Myagdi district, Mukti Rokka, said that Magar did not make much progress. According to him, there were some Thakali houses in the Magar villages and they were business- oriented. Since around 50 years ago, they migrated to Magar villages. They have been producing alcohol, and the major and regular consumers were Magars. Most of the Magars were illiterate and went to Thakali house to drink. Since they did not have money, Magars gave grains and even offered land to the Thakali traders. Gradually, the Magars were becoming poorer and poorer, while Thakali became richer and richer. Those with intelligence and more property became powerful in the village and the district. Therefore, some Thakali enjoyed governance authority in Myagdi district for a long time⁴⁸. Moreover, intellectual activists from Palpa pointed out that the Magars waste their grains and crops for making a huge amount of alcohol and also to buy rice from the market, and in this way they are becoming poorer day by day⁴⁹. As most of them are in poverty, their initiation and their role in politics are limited and they are not able to demand their ethnic rights from the state because of which they are marginalised and excluded socially and politically.

⁴⁸ Interview with Mukkti Rokka, a senior activist of the Myagdi district on 2063/5/23.

⁴⁹ Talking were made with several Magar intellectuals and activists such as Kesar jung Baral Magar and Denesh Rana of the Pipal Danda, Man Sara Pun, Yasodha Pun and Pradeep Pun of the Histan, Amar Rokka and Krishan sir of the Baranja, Amar Dangal of the Somadi, Krishan Thapa Magar of the Lumel and Mukta Aale of the Nirmal Pokhari, etc.

One interesting case supports that the stereotypical traditional values were found to be stronger till this research study in Magar Village. A few years ago, one NGO provided construction materials in Somadi village of Palpa district for making toilets as part of a sanitation programme. The villagers did not use the materials to make toilets beside their house because it was against their tradition. As a result, they did not construct toilets and they wasted and misused the materials for drinking alcohol. Only one house of a literate woman constructed a toilet and she was criticised by her neighbors and was isolated from the Magar community. Therefore, a young activist told the researcher that “most of the Magars in the village are illiterate and conservative; therefore, they can’t decide for themselves what is good and what is bad.”⁵⁰ Due to lots of their fertile land, most of the villagers are poor and depend on physical labour for their survival. The local activist stated that they sold all their good land and shifted to the top of the hills over time as they were uneducated and because of their habit to drink alcohol and they were also searching high hill places for settlement⁵¹. However, the Magars gradually realised the value of education and their habits; therefore, most of them have sent their children to school and some of them are trying to isolate themselves from such kind of trends.

Due to ethnic activism, particularly since the democratic changes of 1990, Magars have been affiliated more with their ethnic identity such as language, religion, dress and life style and cultural activities (i.e. *Sorathi*, *Ghatu*, *Thulo Nach* etc.). They perform dance in their own style. They insist on wearing Magar clothing to indicate their Magar identity. Magar activists usually attend social functions and ceremonies organised by the NMA and the PS attired in these ethnic costumes. Magar and Gurung people use their ethnic dress in public functions and activities organized by their ethnic organisations. The males of both ethnic groups wear the Bhangra, Daura and Kachad with Patuka or army belt. Likewise, both women wear the Ghalek and Makmali Cholo with cotton Patuka. But the Patuka is different in colour, Gurung use blue patuka, while Magars use yellow one. Magar activists perceive that these are the moderate dresses and costumes in their own traditional ones to look nice and for unique fashion. The Magar ethnic dresses are available in main cities of the western region and the numbers of user are increasing day by day. Not only Gurung and Magar women, even Brahmin and Chhetri girls like to use these dresses.

5.4.4 Politics and Political Participation

⁵⁰ Talking with Amar Dangal Magar, Somadi-Palpa on 2063/6/12.

⁵¹ According to the Harka Raskoti, Magars were the earlier settler in the village and when they had enough land they were independent through agro-farming productions made by them. At that time they had many fertile fields at the lower part of hills. But they sold one by one in time after time them to the Brahmin and others due to economic hardships arising because of their alcohol habit and the shift to a colder place. Now they have less fertile land therefore they remain poor (interview in 2063/7/22).

Magars' attitudes towards politics do not seem very encouraging. Magars are marginal in politics. In spite of the need for representation, the participation of Magars in both national and local politics is negligible in proportion to their population (Baral, 2063 VS; Thapa, 2006; Subba [et.al](#), 2002 and also see previous chapter three).

Most Magars' interest in politics has been self-generated, but very few Magar activists are directly involved in politics. Magar activists in Kaski, Palpa and Myagdi districts were willing to reveal their affiliations with their own respective political party. Though the majority of activists are affiliated with some political party, none except the founder presidents of the Samata Party and Janamukti Party (both parties are small and now split into two divisions) have held any significant post at the central level. Whilst, such parties have not occupied an influential role towards the general people nationwide including Kaski, Palpa and Myagdi districts. Even at the local level, very few Magar activists are local political leaders or active members of a political party. A study reveals that out of the 2,780 active members in the Nepali Congress (NC) in Kaski district, only five are Magars whereas 76 are Gurungs (Baral, 2005; 2008). Not only the case of the Magars, a study shows that around 90 percent Gurungs also do not consider any political party and do not want to be involving in politics, rather they want to go abroad for better earning (Gurung, 2059VS : 79). Likewise, there is no Magar member in Kaski district and in general assembly of the party structures. Except a member from Magar side in the Gandaki zone committee of (UML), no Magar activist held the DCM (District Committee Member) or any significant post in the CPN-UML. Those who were active in this party were found maintaining either advisory role or were limited at the ward level at the very local level. But in the Maoist and National People's Front Party, Magars had some representation though Magars in general did not know them. The reason is that they were not involved in the mass politics and had a limited scope of the party organisation respectively. With respect to Kaski, the Magars had significant representations in almost all political parties of Myagdi and Palpa (see the chapter VIII, table no. 8.1). It seems that both are Magar dominated districts, therefore, each party expects local support and mobilisation to their ends. In this respect, no political party could ignore their active participation in politics.

If we talk about the Magar representation in the polity of the state, it is negligible. In Kaski, There were very few candidates from Magar side in the post 1990 elections, which were held three times at national and twice at local level. Only a few candidates could be elected at local level. In this respect, Gurungs are in a far better position. They had at least one or two MPs in the Lower House of Parliament and significant representation in the local government of Kaski. Similarly, the Magars had such position in Myagdi and Palpa. As the dominant ethnic population; it is thought that the concerned party needs to select a Magar

candidate in order to win the election. The trend is also found among the political parties in Kaski that at least Gurungs should be a candidate⁵². At the local level, Gurungs have stronger ethnic feelings than Magars in Kaski. It seems that most of the Gurung activists are traditionally more active in the Nepali Congress Party, whereas, a few are active in the UML, Maoist and the National Democratic Party. More Magar activists are engaged in left parties including the UML and Maoist, whereas a few Magar activists are affiliated with the Nepali Congress and Janamukti party. In comparison to NC and UML, the Maoist party of Kaski, Myagdi and Palpa is more inclusive in terms of representation. Gurung, Magar and other ethnic and Dalits groups have the inclusive representations in its district level committee⁵³.

The Maoist party succeeded in making its two Gurung candidates wins the election in the Gurung dominated constituents of Kaski, and one Magar from Palpa as the Magar dominated place. On the other, due to strong party machinery a Brahmin Maoist won the election in Myagdi though it is Magar dominated district and there were some popular Magar candidates from contested parties. Likewise, a Magar activist got representation from Magar dominated eastern Palpa through the UML side. There was an interesting example in a case of eastern Kaski. It was the Gurung dominated constituency and in the by-election of CA, the Maosits nominated a Gurung candidate who had very recently taken its membership by resigning his former party affiliation with the Rastriya Prajatantra Party. The candidate won the election for two reasons; first, the party had a strong hold with the general mass and secondly he was a candidate from a Gurung community that dominates the whole constituency. With such reality, the political parties are always in search of such an ethnic candidate.

The politics of Nepal in post *janandolan* II has turned more inclusive for the excluded groups in terms of providing the representation for the marginal sectors and ethnic groups of the state. Therefore, the political parties have committed to provide 37.8 percent seats to the ethnic groups in order to make the CA⁵⁴ more inclusive through the Proportional

⁵² But, the Chairman of Tamu Dhi-Kaski, Karma Gurung expressed her view through interview with the authors as that 'Gurungs do not have possessed much political benefit in proportion of their voters and population strength due to a lack of education and proper political socialization process' (Baral 2008).

⁵³ Hence, Maoist has succeeded to make win to its two Gurung and one Dalits candidates as out of the four seats of Kaski district through the FPTP system in CA though they didn't forward the Magar candidate. Even in the Myagdi district the Brahmin candidate won the election forwarded by the Maoist party instead of the Magar candidate that forwarded by the UML, whereas, the Magar population is significantly dominated.

⁵⁴ According to Chairman, Krishna Bahadur Thapa and Vice-Chairman, Indra Bahadur Garbuja Pun and first Magar activist in Kaski-Pokhara claimed himself- Jagat Pun, and young activists Samir Thapa and Purna Rana, Magars have been uniting themselves with their own identity since 1992 under NMA-Kaski and now they are searching a qualified and popular Magar leader/activist that

Representation (PR) System. Likewise, they have tried to include more seats for women, ethnic groups, Madhesi and Dalits even in the First Past the Post System (FPTP). As a result, many Magars and Gurung activists offered the candidacies in their dominated constituents through both systems from various political parties including the major three parties, Maoist, NC and UML in Palpa, Myagdi and Kaski. Likewise, for the first time in the history of election, a senior Magar activist got the candidacy from the UML side in the PR list. Likewise, a Magar woman activist got candidacy from NC as the member in the constituency no. 3 through the FPTP system. It was the first time in Kaski for the Magar to get the candidacy forwarded by the major political parties, which exposed the Magar ethnic identity in politics. But most of the activists opined that almost leading figures of the Magar societies are divided in different political parties and ordinary Magars are neutral (not committed to one political party). Similarly, Magars are fragmented into two groups as the Thapa-Rana vs Puns. Moreover, the Magar settlements in Pokhara have also been divided into three different constituencies. Therefore, local Magar activists in Kaski think that they are much more behind in winning major posts through election in accordance with their ethnic identity, while the Gurungs are very likely to win the election where they are in majority.

In addition to the capability of mobilising the 'masses, money, and muscle', there should be good relations with the central level leaders in order to be a candidate in election or hold the official post in the state. It is the structure of Nepali state not only in the post 1990 democracy but even the post April revolution. Besides holding some nominal representations through the Magar ethnic identity at grass root politics, it seems that they are unlikely to hold such positions in parties and in state affairs within few years to come. Indeed, political parties and their leaders rather than ethnic activists and their organisations, have a dominant role in the selection of candidates for election in multiparty democracy. But, since the post April revolution, the hope has emerged among the local Magar activists towards fair politics and justice to ethnic and other marginal sectors of the state through inclusive democratic process.

However, through different Magar organisations, Magars also actively participated in the democratic movement held in April, 2006. The researcher had observed that the Magars in Pokhara were involved in the mass demonstrations through their ethnic banners like, NMA, PS, Pun Youth Society, and Magar student association. The Magars activists from Beni of Myagdi also published the pamphlets requesting the Magars in order to demonstrate actively in the *janandolan-II*. Almost all activists who actively participated in the mass movement stated that they like democracy instead of any other system monarchical or any other system. It is because in their view they can

may hold the Magar voters in general. They think without political representation in decision making there is not any work in favour to Magar ethnic group

articulate and integrate their ethnic demands in democracy that is not possible in authoritative system. Now, the state is ready to resolve the ethnic demands through inclusive democracy. Since the post April revolution, political parties along with ethnic organisations are in favour of restructuring the state in terms of power sharing democracy, in which along with their ethnic identity they would have autonomy and proper representation at the local or the central government. Such activities and arguments are also found among the ethnic activists and their organisations in Kaski, Myagdi and Palpa. Moreover, Magar activists at local level hope that they will get proper representations in the polity and the resources of the state through which they expect that the Magars also will get empowered politically, economically, socially and culturally.

According to some senior Magar activists of NMA-Kaski, in comparison with the Gurung, the Magars in Kaski do not have any significant representation in politics at local to national levels in proportion to their population. The activists themselves think that Magars migrated from different districts to Pokhara very late in comparison to the Gurungs and Newars. Almost all Gurungs have migrated from the rural parts of the Kaski district and they have dominated settlements as the largest population over the city along with strong ethnic feeling. Magars also feel that the Magar community at present is scattered and does not have a strong sense of common identity which may be used to develop the Magars as an ethnic force. They are therefore, trying to unify the Magar people through their language, religion, and cultural taboo at first. Magar activists think they will only have a chance for adequate representations when they have achieved a strong unity among the Magar ethnic groups along with political awareness at the grass roots.

The activists of the Magar are fragmented in different ideologies of the political parties rather than uniting themselves through their ethnic values and identities.

Therefore, the Magar candidates in the past could not in general sway Magar voters⁵⁵; it seems that the Magar political leadership is not efficient in recognising and responding to the sentiments of their people. Senior Magar activists of Kaski argue⁵⁶ that there should be a capable and popular activist from their own ethnic group whom the Magar community will unanimously support. Most of the activists are affiliated with various ideologies under different political parties, which make them difficult to unite as per their ethnic interest. But with the advent of the April revolution and the after, parties have established the ethnic wings for getting support and have united them under the respected parties. The major cause behind this was the political activism conducted by the ethnic groups and their organisations for seeking more inclusion in democratic polity. Almost all activists at the local level think that the full proportional representation system on the basis of the population of each ethnic and caste group, federal governments and local autonomy are the basic means for resolving the ethnic conflict and empowering the Magars and other marginal groups. As a natural outcome in this democratic atmosphere, the ethnic activists and ethnic organisations are encouraged for more active role in politics. Hence, Magar activists unanimously perceive that they should have their own representatives in the polity of the state for overall development of the Magar groups. Undoubtedly, in order to gain more political representations, political rights and liberties along with ethnic identity should be mentioned in the new constitution.

The researcher found that Magars were not united in politics. They could not drop their vote unanimously in favour of the Magar candidate, whereas, the ethnic feeling is found relatively strong among the Gurungs. According to Krishna Bahadur Thapa Magar, chairman of the NMA-Kaski, the Magar organisation will campaign for a suitable Magar candidate, pushing demands for adequate representation in decision making processes only after a unified base of the Magars' support like that of Gurungs in Kaski. Whereas, some activists who are more active in political parties than Magar organisations expressed their view that they prefer those party candidates whoever advocates the ethnic and minority rights. Undoubtedly, beside the neutral

⁵⁵ The constitution of Nepal is going to make through the Constituent Assembly (CA) for the first time and the election for CA which was held on 10th April, 2008. There are 601 members in CA that compose through the First-Past-the Post (FPTP) System (240), PR System (335) and nominated (26) by the Interim Council of the Ministers. In making the list of candidates for PR System, political party should had follow the proportion as for Madhesi 31.2 percent, Dalits 13, indigenous and ethnic groups 37.8, backward region 4.4, and other 30.2 percent respectively. Among them 50 percent should have women candidates.

⁵⁶ According to Chairman, Krishna Bahadur Thapa and Vice-Chairman, Indra Bahadur Garbuja Pun and first Magar activist in Kaski-Pokhara claimed himself- Jagat Pun, and young activists Samir Thapa and Purna Rana, Magars have been uniting themselves with their own identity since 1992 under NMA-Kaski and now they are searching a qualified and popular Magar leader/activist that may hold the Magar voters in general. They think without political representation in decision making there is not any work in favour to Magar ethnic group.

masses, the politics is decided through the pre-allocated ideology of the political parties rather than ethnic values among the activists. However, in the process of inclusive democracy, they will have the opportunity to show their common ethnic feeling as how much they can expose the Magars identity on the basis of their strength of population towards their participation in state affairs through their activism and ethnic organisations. However, it seemed that the CA polls was an opportunity for putting forward Magar ethnic feeling as how much they could expose the Magars identity through their strength of votes in favour of Magar candidacy.

It seems that almost all issues are decided in the centre and activists from urban areas have greater access to decision making processes than rural people. Therefore, the cities like Pokhara, Tansen and Beni have significant roles to play in leading politics in Kaski, Palpa and Myagdi respectively. Nevertheless, Magars could not achieve the major post like, District President in DDC and Mayor in Municipality even in Magar dominated district of Palpa and Myagdi. They had only two posts of Vice-president in post 1990 democracy era throughout Nepal and that were these two districts. Most of the activists at local level stated that 'we are straight forward and do not know the strategies, skills, manipulating and nepotism. Therefore, we are always backward in making decision in our favour. That's why Magars are not getting any major post in government and party structure.

Magars are in minority and scattered throughout Kaski district. Likewise, in Kaski district, many Magar organisations backed by different political parties have been established with the advent of *janandolan* II. Through establishing such ethnic organisations, political parties are trying to seek the support from the Magar community. Among such organisations, Magar National Liberation Front (MNLF), the sister wings of the CPN-Maoist party is more active for Magar mobilisation at the grass roots. This organisation is active among the Magars in order to politicise party ideology and organise towards Magarant federal province as per Maoist's line. The activities of the organisations are more concerned among the Magars particularly; those settle in the periphery of Pokhara city and relatively low strata than earlier and well settled middle and high classes of the Magars in the heart of the city. In addition to this, some senior activists joined MNLF and the Maoist party because of their personal and blood relations with the leaders of these organisations. Hence, those UML activists who are now associated with Maoist told the researcher that they were quite dissatisfied with the roles played by the UML and they hoped that Magar people will be benefited only by implementation of the policy of the Maoist and MNLF. Besides the MNLF, there are other Magar organisations; the Democratic Magar

Organisation (DMO) and Republic Magar Organisation (RMO) backed by UML and Maoists respectively in the district. These organisations have established in post revolution but have not been active among the Magars at grass roots level. However, the NMLF has increased its influence through either policy or leadership over the NMA. The activists of the MNLF and the Maoist are trying to organise the Magar people, assuring them that they will establish the *Magarant* ethnic autonomous region in which their various ethnic rights and participation in polity will be ensured.

5.5 Conclusion

Magars have been organised by different ethnic organisations in different parts of the country. Magar ethnic activism in Nepal formerly started under the Langhali Pariwar in the early 1980s and then under the NMA since 1992. The restoration of multiparty democracy in 1990 paved the way of open society for the guarantee of basic human rights to Nepalese citizens. As a consequence, various political and non-political, including ethnic organisations, have been found to be flourishing in a short span of time. The level of consciousness among the people rose very high and people from various sectors started raising their voices for rights. The ethnic organisations also started articulating and integrating their interests for seeking more power of the state with their identity. Hence, the ethnic organisations have turned to their agendas of inclusive democracy and ethnic autonomy through their activism in post *janandolan* II. Therefore, the Interim Constitution 2007 has further recognised ethnic rights along with the major aspects of declaration like Nepal as secular, inclusive and fully democratic state, and all mother tongues spoken in Nepal are national languages. In this environment, Magar organisations have fostered socio-cultural changes in Magar communities. They demand further ethnic rights and proper representation in decision- making so that their communities will be strengthened through inclusive democracy.

The two districts Palpa and Myagdi are identified as Magar dominated regions as well as for their historical territories. These are known as tourist destinations for scenic beauty and aboriginal Magar culture. Kaski is famous for its natural and cultural diversity and can be taken as a prime example of Nepal's multi-ethnic mosaic. After the establishment of their central level organisation, the activists who were retired from British-Gorkha service, or who came from such families and migrated from other districts, lay down the foundation of the Magar activism in Kaski-Pokhara. Their activism formally started in Palpa and Myagdi only after 1990 with the main initiation of the Magar activists of local politics. The activism through NMA-Kaski is more effective in comparison to other districts like Palpa and Myagdi. Two factors

have contributed more for their effectiveness. First, as mentioned earlier that Magar activists of the retired British-Gorkha have their hold on NMA-Kaski. They have contributed significantly for the reason that personally they do not have to worry about their livelihood. So they have spare time for their activism. Thus the army tradition has also its effective role for their activeness. Second, migrated and minority are two basic causes for their solidarity, unity and cooperation essential for their ethnic identity. These are not seen among the activists of Palpa and Myagdi, where most activists are more devoted to their personal jobs and activities of political parties to which they are affiliated rather than their ethnic identity. However, Magar activists in the early history of their activism in 1990s they had been tried to change their status by changing their culture through Sanskritisation and Hinduisation. But in post 1990s, Magars have tried to organize themselves in many forms to preserve their culture and language, reduce the excessive consumption of alcohol and pork at the ethnic festivals, cultural ceremonies, and rites. Some are now trying to go back to their old beliefs and rituals, such as shamanism and animism. Some others are adopting a new religion, i.e. Buddhism, rejecting Hinduism.

Magar activists had been found active in Kaski under Langhali Pariwar since 1981, but it remained ineffective until the NMA-Kaski was established in 1992. A year later, the PS was set up to promote co-operation among the Pun people and Pun identity. Both organisations have launched programmes for cooperation among the Magars, to revitalise, religion, and ethnic costumes and have attempted to bring about socio-cultural changes in the urban and rural Magars of Kaski. Likewise, NMA in Myagdi, Kaski and Palpa more or less succeeded in having the Magar language and Buddhist religion recorded in the 2001 census. Magars who previously did not know their mother tongue are learning to speak their language in a language revitalisation programme run by the NMA-Kaski and Myagdi. Although activists and their activities are more concentrated in urban area, such as Pokhara, most of the Magars in the hills and rural parts particularly in Kaski have stated their identity as Magar, adding Magar title with their clan/surnames. Magars are able to give their identity in terms of tribal feeling and their ethnic practices as well as their history and communality of kinship and culture through primordial activism.

NMA and its units at the local level were more active during the census period of 2001 to mobilise Magar people in its campaign for writing Magar language as their mother tongue and Buddhism as their religion. They actively conducted this campaign for long term ethno-political benefit. Nonetheless, Magar activism has been facing challenges in its campaign to make the Magar people return to their original

cultural practices. They have been trying to minimise the extent of Sanskritisation and Hinduisation on the one hand, and they have to face the new challenges of modernisation, urbanisation, and globalisation on the other. Originally, the Magars were animist-shamanist and had their own mother tongue. But Hinduism and Nepali language have influenced them. Magar activists at local level are in dilemma regarding the issue of religion. Some activists close to the NMA argue that they are Buddhists, but they have not totally become Buddhist in practice. Others are divided over the adoption of *Bhusal* or defence of shamanist and animist practices. Most of the activists close to the PS, particularly in Pokhara, practiced the Hindu religion throughout their lives. Therefore, all religious practices will be considered as part of religious activism, if Magars write their religion as *Magarant Dharma*.

In terms of the political agenda, the Magar activists in Palpa and Myagdi perceived that although their strength of voting are in dominating position, they are marginalised in district and local politics. Therefore, they could not get success to establish their ethnic rights, promote their culture and develop their society and people. So far in Kaski, Magar activists argue that, although their population remains a minority, they have the decisive role in the election. They want representation in decision-making at the centre and in local governments. Now they are trying to have their access to almost all sectors of society and state. They are trying to bring unity among the Magars in Kaski. They are trying to give their representation in politics through elections at local and national level. Most of the activists think that Magars should be included in mainstream political authority through reservations in a PR system so that they receive more ethnic rights with strong local autonomy through the restructuring of the state.

With respects to Palpa and Myagdi, the NMA-Kaski has been a strong force for Magar activism among Magars through publications of language books and audio, cultural programmes, and demonstration and processions. Hence, since the establishment of NEFIN-Kaski, it has been playing a driving role to put forward the ethnic activism collectively. Those who support them think that Magar activists should launch an awareness campaign for the revival of Magar culture and language among their societies and encourage Magars to use their mother tongue in daily communication. But those who are hostile to them allege that the activities, as well as the leadership of the NMA, are limited to urban areas and that they are merely an ex-army club in Kaski. The PS is not above such accusations, and is called a playground for power seeking among the Pun society. The Magar activism in Kaski has, however, succeeded in promoting education, religion, language, and ritual revival programmes

among the Magar people. Such activities are conducted among the Magars through separate Magar organisation-NMA and PS. Thapa-Rana and Pun Magars may have distinct cultures in their original communities, but they live together and engage in similar practices in most of the hills of Kaski.

Broadly speaking, religion and rituals are similar among the Magars irrespective of geographical and clan differences. Most of them have their own shamanism and animism practices and aboriginal culture and festivals which are more or less influences of the Hindu philosophy. But if we go through micro study, then it seems variation on their culture and religious life between village to village, community to community, one clan to other, earlier settler to lately migrated people. However, culture and rituals are seen as their earlier practices which are guided by the immediate existing social circumstances and ancestors' beliefs. Such old mixed types of practices have been followed by them from generation to generation. Directly or indirectly, their heterogeneous practices have contributed to their present civilisation. Cultural differences, even if they exist as a result of geographical and social circumstances, have never been the sources to divide them. In spite of diversity in their customs and traditions, they belong to a single tribe.

Although there are many similar traditions among the Magars of various clans and sub-clans particularly in Myagdi, Palpa and hills of the Kaski, Thapa-Rana and Pun clans perform some slightly different customs and rituals in Pokhara due to the influx of migrants and representation from opposite geographical and ethnical diversity. Puns are much closer to Gurungs in their lifestyle and to Brahmins in terms of religion. Most of the Thapa-Rana Magars are from a homogeneous society; therefore, they have practiced their *kutumba* system and are inclined to shamanism and animism practices. Some of the Thapa-Rana-Ale Magars living in heterogeneous societies and those who are close to other high caste hill groups and the traditional power of state have been dominated by the Hindu culture. However, there is no fundamental difference between the NMA and the PS. The PS will affiliate with the NMA, if either the Pun activists get proper representation in proportion to their total number, or if the NMA recognises it as the upper units revising its existing provision for preliminary committee. Although, activists from the younger generation are not generally in favour of having separate Magar organisations for Thapa-Rana-Ale and the Pun clans, it seems that the divisions will continue for a while, partly because of competition between existing Magar elite figures at the local level along with the identity politics.

NMA has extended itself among the Magars at various districts and at the local levels. Its preliminary committees are active at the grass roots. MNLF has been increasing its effect among the Magars at the local level along with the latest development of the Maoist politics. It spread with the Maoists politics because this politics gave preference to the ethnic demands as ethnic autonomy and the federalism. NMA has forwarded its agendas as the social welfare and ethnic identity among the Magar people, while MNLF is activating among the Magars with the demands of the rights to self-determination and federal autonomy with fusion of politics and ethnicity. However, the trends have changed now as various Magar organisations raise the matters of political issue that is the demand of inclusive democracy. They wish to participate in the state authority and guarantee their basic human rights irrespective of their inclination to various political parties or organisation. Addressing these voices, after the *janandolan* II, the state seems to be more inclusive. The inclusive democracy is supposed to include the ethnicity and ethnic identity in ruling over the state affairs and in the existence of political power at the grass root level. Nevertheless, the Magar organisations have succeeded to increase the ethnic awareness among the Magars in general by mobilising them through their activism. However, the Magars and democracy interface positively in terms of their perception of democracy. The Magars have felt that democracy is essential for their representations in which their ethnic identity is recognised. Hence, it helps to build the institutionalisation of democracy, which is ultimately responsible to create an environment for peace, tranquility and development as well as an equitable society.

CHAPTER VI

DEMOCRACY AND MAGAR ETHNICITY

6.1 Democracy and *Janandolan* -II

The Magar's movement and other ethnic activism could be seen as a contributory element to broaden the scope of democracy. Democracy with collective right and identity politics is a newly established principle in Nepal. The history of Nepal has its own impact in making the meaning of democracy narrow with primary emphasis on individual rights of citizens. Democracy is often used as a symbol of associated concepts like freedom and liberty. The potency of the term is demonstrated in Nepal through people's movements against the authoritative regimes of monarchy. The term 'autonomy' is also now associated with democracy in terms of self-rule by the sovereign citizens themselves. It has been an issue which has been invoked by the opposite sides in conflicts, not only confined to the self-declared ambitions of Nepal but also to all mobilisation of ethnic conflicts in multiculturalism. The term has a special meaning in Nepal since the Maoist's priority highlighted the issues for seeking the support of the ethnic people, with the beginning of the Maoist war in 1996. As a real sovereign citizen, the ethnic people hope to be involved in the inclusive process which is associated with 'democracy', through the agenda of state restructuring. One of the major outputs of the April revolution (2006) was the state restructuring. The state restructuring is a great issue in contemporary politics of Nepal for inclusive democracy in terms of giving space to excluded groups like the ethnic, Madheshi, minorities, Dalits, women, etc. This is symbolised as an inclusive process to adopt rational and real democracy through political equality and liberty in order to access power and resources from various strata of the society and state.

Nevertheless the citizens' right centric concept of democracy is very dominant and the Magar respondents' understanding is not different from this general understanding. Such micro perception is also influenced by macro level understanding, shaped by history of Nepal. In Nepalese context, the term democracy, following the dominant discourses, tended to imply for and against certain types of regimes and governance for the last six decades (1951-2008). The years 1950, 1990 and 2006 are the great dates that succeeded the movements for democracy. Early, in the movement of 1950, armed revolution against the century long Rana oligarchy opened the door for democracy for the first time in Nepal. However, it could not sustain and stabilize due to the political unawareness and absence of democratizing the state's institutions and political parties. The state had been under the tyrannies and absolute feudalism

throughout the century long Rana autocratic and oligarchic rule. Therefore, at that moment democratic norms and values were not properly disseminated. Along this ground, 10 years after democratic transition, Nepal again went under a 'closed society' for the next 30 years through the coup masterminded by the king in 1960. In and around 1990, during the favorable worldwide democratization trends, people again stepped up to the movement for democracy. Against the partyless Panchayat system and absolute monarchy, multiparty democracy and constitutional monarchy was established through a 59 days long mass movement (*janandolan-I*). Once again, democracy ended with a royal takeover on state power in October 2002 and seizure of all the political power; the king became an active monarch in February 2005. This event was said to have happened by the weak institutionalized democracy, because political parties, which were thought to be for democracy, were becoming corrupt and powerless. On the other side, the nascent democracy was shaken in 1990-2002 due to the ten years' Maoist insurgency and intra-party and inter-party conflicts. However, people in general are the basis of the system and state; they become sovereign only in democracy. Therefore, successful mass uprising in April, 2006 (*janandolan-II*) once again proved people's power against the royal regime through the restoration of genuine democracy. Moreover, it renounced monarchy and embraced republican democracy with the expectation of processing the empowerment of marginalised and excluded people.

In each mass movement of Nepal, democracy has been the key issue in order to achieve liberty, equality, and people's rule. The values of democracy have been disseminated at local level through the CBOs (Community Based Organisations), civil society, NGOs (Non-governmental Organisation) and ethnic activism that have been found to be rapidly increasing since 1990. In addition to this development, the people from rural villages and the marginal groups like Dalits and ethnic had been mobilised by the Maoist insurgency. This, ultimately, increased the political awareness of the people. Likewise, the 12 points agreement between the seven party alliance and the Maoists helped to strengthen the political ecology for mass movement. Therefore, the April (2006) revolution as mass movement called *janandolan-II* succeeded in restoring democracy through huge participation of the people in general. The following sections explain various dimension of democracy in regards to Magars, i.e. agencies of political awareness, participation in the big political event, *Janandolan II* in particular, understanding of democracy and monarchy. It is worthwhile to mention here the impact of context and situation in prioritising definition of democracy. This study was carried out in around the time of *Janandolan II* against a decade long

Maoist war. So, obviously peace might be overriding concern while associating the meaning of democracy.

6.2 Democratisation through Knowledge and Agencies (Modern and Traditional) of Political Communication in the rural Magar villages

In the process of democratisation, the Magar held several beliefs about democracy and democratic government. They also held other beliefs about the monarchy. Ideally, these beliefs did not go hand-in-hand in this country. During the institutionalisation of democracy as the recent political phenomena in post April revolution, attempts were made to establish the republic, inclusion, basic human rights and peace process as the inherent part of Nepalese political culture. Political culture develops through better means of political socialisation and education. People in general obtain political knowledge and perception through the means of political mobilisation and education. Undoubtedly, political education and mobilisation are the proper means of political socialisation which assist in developing the process of *information-interest-interaction-and recruitment* of the people in democratic politics. In this regard, the people at the local or village level are relatively well informed about the existing political situation with the capital and urban centres of the state. Although the rural areas are far behind in terms of effective modern communication due to least developed nature of the country but the people from these regions are more aware and eager to achieve the events and news from the capital and throughout the nation. Therefore, they are trying to link their territories with the modern means of communication and development for making life relatively comfortable than existing traditional way of life. The movement for democracy as *Janandolan-II* resolved the Maoist conflict and since then the developmental activities have been launched. As a result, many villages are privileged with motor road, electric power and VHF phones. Actually, the peace process through the Comprehensive Peace Agreement between the government and the Maoists has encouraged the state to improve access to rural parts through the local administration, particularly for the construction and development.

During the field study in mid 2006, the researcher did not find peoples' access to motor road, electric power; phones, newspapers and TV in most of the rural villages, but some of them have such facilities since the early 2007. When the researcher was in the field, he observed that a few people had radios through which they got to know the news and events of the country and they used to share among villagers. Most of the field areas in this research are rural villages of the Magar domination. The villages

like Bhorle, Bhagani, Kokaldhara of Somadi VDC, Kuwadi and Rimigha of the Pipaldanda VDC of Palpa district; Tolka of Lumle VDC of Kaski; and the entire Histan VDC and Baranja VDC were found to be deprived of motor road and most of the villages had no electric power and phone service. It has been known that electric power and VHF (Very High Frequency) facilities have reached the people in some of those areas by now. The people of Nirmal Pokhari and Lumle VDCs had access to electric power and motor roads since they are close to Pokhara city. Therefore, they are well-informed about the major events on politics of Pokhara and country through the person to person contact and activists though they did not have good access to modern means of communication like, news papers and TV at village level. However, in almost all the villages of study areas, the schools, teashops, public clubs and other local level organisations of political parties were found effective tools of gathering and communications among the people. Likewise, there were *Katuwal*⁵⁷ system in some villages for calling public meeting or contributing to public and social work.

Various community based organisations, like mother groups, user groups and cooperative societies were active agents in mobilising people at the local level concerning their social and personal matters. Through these organisations, people have initiated saving and credit activities and micro business for improving their economic condition on one hand, and conversion about the contemporary issues and matters in their meeting which enhance their knowledge and leadership on the other hand. Likewise, since establishing these types of grass-roots organisations, particularly mother groups (*Aama Samuha*) have been increasing ideas of women rights as well as small development and community works through their members. Researcher found such activities in Pokhara, Nirmal Pokhari and Lumle of Kaski; Pipladanda and somadi of Palpa; and Baranja and Histan of Myagdi. They constructed pathway, Temple, water tank and small bridge. Likewise, they began avoiding alcoholism and gambling through which people, mainly males waste their money and time. The foremost thing is that along with enhancing their knowledge and education with affiliation in such grass roots organisations, they are able to dialogue frequently about the political and social issues in order to better the society and nation. Therefore, village-level organisations have been successful in constructing and communicating ideas and meanings among the villagers about socio-economic, cultural and political issues.

⁵⁷ When there was no modern means of communication, the Katuwal system was popular in each traditional hamlet, village or society for calling public meeting, donating labour to public work and performing the worship to gods and goddess. Katuwal can get some grains or crops from villagers, if he has appointed by the Trust or any institution then he privileges with some grain or money form that respected organisation

For the last few years, it has been observed that roles of village level organisations is significant in not only improving the living conditions of different groups of people but also making them aware of their social, economic, political and cultural rights (Baral 2007). Considering this, it can be observed in firm grounds of different kinds of socio- political transformations are taking place. Along with this process, people raise their voices against disparity regardless of caste, ethnicity, gender, class, etc. Therefore, the roles played by village level organisations in promoting such issues are laying the groundwork for new social and political awareness. Such new socio-political awareness, not only democratise the day-to-day lives of their society and members, but also gives pressure on the state and political forces to work towards more democratisation.

While visiting Histan-Tikot of Myagdi in October 2006, it took five hours walk foot to reach, the researcher was surprise to find the telephone as well as internet services and electric power for the village people. They have been using these facilities for the last few years. According to Pradeep Pun, the headmaster in the village, “The availability of such facilities makes the lives of the village people much easier through which we promote our knowledge and business. We have knowledge on day to day news and political events both in the country and abroad”. He further said “with the use of the internet, we get the information about the goods and products of these villages which facilitates us to buy and sell the things and helps to communicate among ourselves with the people outside as well”⁵⁸. During the field work, the researcher did not find electric and motor road facilities in most of the villages of Baranja, Pipal Danda and Somadi VDCs. Therefore, there was no internet, TV and newspaper for conferring the day to day news, but a few people had radios. Likewise, there were no phone services in Pipaldanda, Somadi and Baranja until June 2006, while the researcher found some of the facilities on his second trip to these villages. Besides Baranja and Histan VDCs, recently the villages like Nirmal Pokhari of Kaski, Pipaldanda and Somadi of Palpa have access to the motor roads which have made it convenient for the village people to get to the district headquarters through the use of vehicles. The accessibility of motor roads has caused a tremendous change in the village. There is a great mobility among the people and people’s lives have become better. Not only their standard of living and per capita income have enhanced, they have also got wonderful opportunity to update themselves through the news and views

⁵⁸ He said that such facilities were available only in four villages namely Nagi, Histan, Ramche, and Shika-Ghara. The headmaster further said that these facilities were provided by a noted personality, Mahabir Pun, a Magar developmental activist who was conferred Magsaysay award in 2007 (Interview with Pradeep Pun, 2063/7/24. (Further information about Mahabir Pun; see The Kathmandu Post 2007).

that have happened locally, nationally and internationally as they are regularly linked with the urban centers and district headquarters.

The researcher also found that teachers are the role model and popular in each village. Most of the villagers stated that they were the most respectable and influential people in the society. They were said to be very effective medium not only to provide education, but also to disseminate information, to generate ideas, to convince and persuade people. Through the field study, the researcher obtained plenty of information about the teachers in villages and concluded that they can play effective roles to persuade and raise awareness among the people. Teachers are the effective medium to teach the village people about the social and political values, where there are no other alternatives except them. For instance, it was found that Pradeep Pun (a teacher of Histan high school) had a tremendous impact among the village people of Histan. Same was the case of, Kumar Garbuja Pun of Rima village (a teacher of Rima high school) Krishna sir, Amar Master and the other teachers in Baranja, villages.

Moreover, the researcher noticed through the visit in the villages that the teachers have been playing a decisive role in socialising the villagers and their children through formal school education and informal communication with them about the contemporary political events and social norms. In most of the gatherings or meetings, they were found to be the key figures to accomplish any goals. Only the teachers in the villages were found to have been playing a very significant role in socialising people since there were no formal government and NGOs in existence. They generate ideas and beliefs among the people of the village. Moreover, they were effective mediums in teaching the village people about the modern values of social justice, equality and freedom, and encouraging them to discard the bad practices and feudalism. Since schools have been established in all the villages, the teachers have a good place in the society and they are treated as respectful persons of the society and are greatly honoured. Both, activists and general people regard them as very important persons from various aspects in their locality. Due to the nature of their job, most of the teachers seemed to be in favour of equality, liberty and social justice. Since the teachers have an access both in the village and the town and they keep themselves updated with contemporary social and political values, they have been found to be very impressive who can easily influence the village people. Researcher found them to be in regular contact with the activists of different political parties. Teachers were found updating themselves with everyday happenings through radios, TVs, Phones, etc. It was found that the teachers were also the best means to solve the household and social problems at the local villages. The researcher got to know by visiting these

villages that the teachers are influential figures who can easily impress the people because they have good position in the society. They can play a key role in the social transformation and political mobilisation at the local level.

Along with CBOs, NGOs and governmental organisations at the village, the traditional governing institutions like *Guthi*, *Mukhiya*, *Jimmuwal* are also in existence to govern society though these institutions have no effective role in modern democracy. Besides these ruling institutions at local level, Bheja seems as the distinct governance entity, which has the crucial and conventional authority for ruling the traditional Magar community. It is a traditional organisation of the Magar village, existing particularly in the eastern part of Palpa district. It is the supreme authority that plays a decisive role in solving any problems that appear in the village, and helps to promote the cultural norms and values. It has the sovereign power in ruling of the given village. The cultural and rituals performances are carried out with the decision of *Bheja*. The entire households of the village are liable to be the members of *Bheja* and the existence of any household is not accepted if it goes against the established norms. If the village is big, there can be two or more *Bhejas*. It seems that each hamlet has its own *Bheja*. Besides the cultural performances, other matters may be under its jurisdiction.

Researcher has an experience during his field work in Palpa. When the researcher was waiting for a Maoists leader in their office, the five Magar youngs were present in there. A young boy, called Aalok Pun, treated friendly and he contacted the authority of the Maoist party. After a few minutes a member of the MNLF of Palpa district committee came out and we introduced ourselves of eachother. The five young guys were exiled from their village due to their disobedience of *Bheja*'s decision. According to them, around six months ago, they became Christians and followed the Christian rituals instead of their traditional religion and customs. Bheja warned them not to follow the Christian religion. There were asked to perform their own traditional religious practices that are close to animism and shamanism under Hindu influence. When they ignored the advice, *Bheja* decided to exile them from the village. Therefore, they had come to ask for the Maoist support. But the member of the MNLF argued that they should have followed their own traditional religion. If they had obtained any benefit from the Christian society then they could use and take the benefit. So far the religion is concerned he further stated that it would be better for them not to go against the traditional customs and decisions of their *Bheja*.

Bheja has the supreme power to rule over the village in respected Magar society. All villagers who have settled in respected village should be the members of *Bheja*. Man

Bahadur Rana, the *Bheja* chief and Mukta Bahadur Sonari, the former *Bheja* chief from the Kuwadi village of the Pipaldanda VDC, Palpa provided some information about how *Bheja* operates. According to them, *Bheja* takes decision on the problems and issues related to villagers. Its major functions are to perform the religious and cultural duties. They further stated that *Bheja* decides the annual rate for their production like, crops, goats, chickens etc. There are some compulsory provisions to each *Bheja* member, for instance if any member has any production for sale then he/she should give priority within *Bheja*. Likewise, every household in a given village should join *Bheja*'s activity and at least a member from each household should participate in its function. The major duty of *Bheja* includes performing the *Chandi Puja* in May. However, it seems that it is an informal and traditional governance system of the Magars as a cultural heritage in Barha Magarant region, particularly in eastern Palpa. Although the political, quasi-political and other modern organisations such as NGOs/INGOs are reducing the extensive scope of *Bheja*, It still performs significant tasks in the village, where almost all the villagers are present. Moreover, it is found that through the schooling of *Bheja*, villagers are gradually socialised towards their traditional customs, culture and authority.

Through this institution along with their leadership, the senior and elder members try to enforce the traditional value of their society while influencing the young and educated members who seek to embrace modern trends and discard the conservative practices. Some of the young generation, specially educated try to avoid the coercion and prefer the modern democratic values on one hand and on the other they oppose the bad practices though it comes under *Bheja* jurisdiction. Such kinds of objections are made in between the youth and some time with the senior activists but they could not oppose the authority of the *Bheja*. However, *Bheja* is the cultural heritage of the traditional Magar society, though it could be reformed with modern value of democracy.

Since the advent of democracy in 1990, the women groups as most effective and influential agents in the grassroots level, have been mobilising the women in general in the socio-political, economic and cultural fields. They are organised through the popular tag '*Ama Samuha*' and carry out various activities such as small development activities and saving and credit cooperative for the welfare of the society. The researcher found such groups, not only in his local village in Pokhara city, but also in every village. In Baranja and Histan of Myagdi, the researcher interacted with the chief of such groups focusing on their activities for socio-political awareness and the general tendency of the villagers and the Maoists. These groups had launched many

programmes related to their socio-economic conditions and actions such as anti-alcoholism and anti-gambling. Likewise, many other activities have been carried out by the *Samuha* in order to increase the knowledge of local villagers, particularly women for discarding the negative trends and conserving the positive beliefs through literacy programmes and discussion on their day to day problems and contemporary issues. Most of the chairpersons of these *Samuha* in different villages face some obstacles in terms of management of time and money but they collectively use their strength to promote good causes in society. Associated with such *Samuha*, women are now able to talk about the gender equality, women liberty, social justice and progress of their life and development of their society.

The researcher found that Magar society is more democratic and equitable compared to other traditional high caste hill societies. Magar women are allowed to talk frequently about the issues of family and society. In most of the villages, they participate equally in drinking local wine and social functions though some restrictions such as worshipping can be present in some villages. For example, in Baranja village only senior male members are allowed to perform their *Ago Dhau* worshipping. Likewise, in some families the male members do not like to see their wives being more active as they cannot be all dominant any longer and also because of anti-alcohol activities. In Histan VDC, one of the women activists told the researcher that in many families in her locality treat them as equal active members inside and outside the house. She further stated that in some families women are still backward and they are not allowed to participate in public functions. According to her one member of *Samuha* was punished by her counterpart because she participated in the meeting of *Aama Samuha* without his permission. The next woman was kept in detention in her house by her husband in order to restrict her from attending the *Samuha's* meeting.

In Pokhara, one woman activist of Nadipur said in her interview with researcher that some women in her society have the same problems in terms of male dominance and polygamy as with high caste societies. When researcher asked about the property rights of women that are in women's name, she indicated that when her males are abroad, the women manage the whole family. Therefore they have ownership over the property. Now there is a trend for going foreign in other groups of people including Brahmin and Chhetri male members. They send their earning to their wives who manage their property. Hence, there is a trend to call these women '*Lahurni*' in all

societies irrespective of Brahmin, Chhetri, Dalits, Gurung, Magar and other⁵⁹. These women enjoy more freedom relative than other housewives.

On the basis of local level organisations, teachers, local political and social elites, and activists are the agents of popular means of communications. There are many local level organisations such as water and forest user groups, clubs and religious trust in most of the villages. Besides these, tea shops and *chautari* seemed to be the public places for gathering villagers and talking informally about the day to day activity and political events. Though the activists and teachers have the dominant role, people participate in such discussions and articulate their attitudes and beliefs, hence, share the ideas and ideologies by democratic conversions. Teachers' roles have been found very impressive and effective in political socialisation process in most of the rural villages. By participating and observing in such informal meetings, the researcher found that most of the people, either commoners or activists, are very worried about existing instability and conflict in the state. Most of them wanted peace, solidarity, progress and development in their place and country. They criticised and commented all the parties and leaders do not work in democratic manner to resolve the contemporary conflicts and violence which is affecting the stability of nascent democracy. They expected peace and development along with liberties and equalities and devolvement of power and resources for the people at the local level.

Villagers were worried by their problems and their lives were getting hard due to rising prices of the daily needs. Therefore, they argued that the government and political parties as not working in a responsible manner towards people even when they have full power to rule the country. However, during the field work throughout the year of 2006, the researcher found some current issues being discussed among the people at grassroots level. Those were regarding the future of nascent democracy, settlement of the Maoist and ethnic conflict, election for constitution assembly and future of the King. Would it be possible to have democracy even when a Maoist or ethnic conflict is present? How can democracy be institutionalised and will it succeed in address the people's needs? What does the constituent assembly mean and will the election for assembly be held in proper time? How will the King react if the people give a verdict in favour of the republic state, and can the state manage the ethnic conflicts through democratic processes? These discussions were found in heterogeneous and homogeneous Magar societies in various villages of the Kaski, Palpa and Myagdi districts.

⁵⁹ In colloquial at the village, those person who goes the foreign in order to do job and earn money is called '*Lahure*' and his wife treated by the terminology of the '*Lahurni*' or '*Laureni*'.

6.3 Participation in Democratic Movement

Magar people have positive belief towards democracy, and consequently some were involved in the April 2006 movement too. At this time, those Magar villagers who participated in the movement were interested in sharing their experiences and views on democracy. Due to urban centers, most of the demonstrations and mass rally were organised in the district headquarters. In the course of democratic movement, a huge crowd gathered in Pokhara of Kaski, Beni of Myagdi and Tansen of Palpa district every day for 19 days. It is interesting to note that some mass rallies for democracy also took place in rural areas of the country. In Tolka, the Magar dominated village of Lumle VDC (Kaski), and Baranja of Myagdi are such rural villages, where people at local level organised some protest and mass meetings, and most of the villagers took part. Likewise, some of those villages, which are close to their district headquarter, came to participate in such democratic exercises. Most of the processions and mass meetings were held in the urban and district centers of various districts. Therefore, people relatively close to such centers, and who were politically active, participated in the movement. Around 50 percent of the Magars as voters and activists stated that they had participated in the April 2006 movement; more details are displayed as follows.

Table No. 6.1

Did you Participate in the people's movement (April (2006) Revolution)?

	Voters			Activists			Total Frequency		
	Yes	No	Total	Yes	No	Total	Yes	No	Total
Kaski	37 37.0%	63 63.0%	100 100.0%	22 88.0%	3 12.0%	25 100.0%	59 47.2%	66 52.8%	125 100%
Myagdi	45 45.0%	55 55.0%	100 100.0%	23 92.0%	2 8.0%	25 100.0%	68 54.4%	57 45.6%	125 100%
Palpa	33 33.0%	67 67.0%	100 100.0%	19 76.0%	6 24.0%	25 100.0%	52 41.6%	73 58.4%	125 100%
Total	115 38.3%	185 61.7%	300 100.0%	64 85.3%	11 14.7%	75 100.0%	179 47.7%	196 52.7%	375 100%

Source : Field Survey-2006

As per above table, 85 percent of activists were involved in April revolution, whereas, only 38 percent of general voters had been involved in the people's movement that was held in April, 2006. Undoubtedly, due to political awareness, the activists are more active in the process of political and social change rather than people in general.

The table also shows that Magars of Myagdi from both groups, activists and voters, were much active rather than Kaski and Palpa. It is a well known fact that almost all demonstrations and protest activities were launched in the urban areas, particularly in the headquarters of the district. Pokhara (Kaski) is dominated by Gurungs and Magars, especially by the foreign ex-armies who are generally not found to participate in the discourses on the issues of politics and state. Likewise, Palpa is the only district where majority of its population are Magars. Majority of Magars are found settled in the rural areas rather than in Tansen city, the headquarter of the district. About 3 percent Magars inhabit in Tansen city. Beside, the mobilisation of the people through their ethnic organisations and political parties has also determined their role in the political participation. It seems that Magar organisations and the political parties including Maoists substantially encouraged participation in Myagdi district. Even on the eve of *anandolan-II*, the Magar Sang-Myagdi, without guidance from its central organisation, published pamphlet requesting the Magars in general for their participation in the *Andolan* (MS, Myagdi-2063VS).

Indeed, most of the demonstrations and mass meetings were launched by seven political parties, where people from middle and lower classes at the urban centers actively participated. In addition, Maoists also supported and contributed to these processions of huge mass rallies by forcing or requesting the people in their villages to join the demonstrations. Likewise, as a regular participant in the Janandolan-II, the researcher observed that ethnic organisations, including Magar associations, also initiated some demonstrations by mobilising Magar people. When encountering individuals who participated in the April movement, most of them said that full democracy in terms of peace and development was the inspiring factor for their involvement in the movement. Most of the respondents told the researcher that two or more factors inspired and motivated them to participate in the movement. The first perception of people at the local level was that only democracy and its processes would solve the Maoist and ethnic conflicts, therefore, they liked to join the April 2006 revolution. Secondly, most of the respondents said they were involved in the movement due to the request made by the political parties. The researcher asked one of the Magar activists in Pokhara why he had participated in the mass movement. He responded that the political party inspired him to do so. In his observation 'although parties are corrupted and distracted from the democratic norms and values, they are the only means of democratic process. Without the existence of these parties, multiparty democracy does not survive'. Therefore, he joined the demonstration requested by the political parties in order to make the movement successful. Likewise, in Tolka of Lumle VDC of Kaski, a Magar activist called Jhapat Thapa, who also

represented the former local government, said that they also organised some mass rallies in their village on behalf of the political parties at the local level to seek inclusive democracy. In his view, inclusive democracy denotes the people at grass roots would be privileged by resources and decision making authority of the state.

The researcher has found many other Magar activists, particularly settled in urban centers of Kaski, Palpa and Myagdi too the initiative and influenced the Magar people for their participation in the movement. Captain Krishna Bahadur Thapa, Surendra Thapa and Motishwar Thapa in Kaski; Bal Ram Rana, Dil Bhadur Rana and Shyam Somai of Palpa; and Mukta Bahadur Rokka, Raj Kumar Thapa and Nar Kumari Pun of Myagdi stated in their interviews that they requested and successfully to mobilised the Magar people in order to take active part in *Janandolan-II*. Besides the request made by seven political parties and Magar organisations, the Maoists also played a decisive role in the democratic movement through peaceful means. The Maoist activists from Baranja village told that they requested and compelled the people to participate in the mass demonstrations which were conducted in Beni Bazaar, the district headquarter of Myagdi⁶⁰. Some commoners also corroborated the statement as they were regularly involved in the April 2006 movement because of the Maoists promise to take part in the movement until it succeeds. Even the Maoists did not want to bother villagers regarding their household jobs; they were ready to do it in order to make the success the movement. Whereas, some activists told to the researcher that sometimes Maoists gathered the people and led them close to Beni Bazaar and they disappeared⁶¹ then the UML and NC local leaders initiated the leadership role to these mass rallies. In addition demonstrations and programmes for democracy were also launched in some villages of Kaski, Myagdi and Palpa whereas Magars from other rural areas of these districts said that they had far from district headquarters; therefore, they did not participate in the movement on a regular basis despite their support for it.

It seemed that most of the activists were mobilised in the people's movement due to their affiliation with political parties or ethnic associations including Magar organisation. The researcher also regularly joined and actively participated in the April 2006 revolution. As a participant observer throughout the 19 days-long *janandolan*, the researcher himself found that the general mass from the ethnic side seemed very nominal in the earlier days of the movement. He put forward some queries to two ethnic persons in the gathering of tea shop, Gurung and Magar who

⁶⁰ Interview with Amar Rokka, former Chief of the Janasarkar-Baranja and DCM of Maoist party 2063/7/13

⁶¹ At that time Maoists still were underground.

were the permanent settlers in Pokhara. The answers were almost similar as they expressed that they did not care about political upheavals. They were more concerned about their income and often sought foreign job and education of their children abroad. They further said, 'if you have money you can spend your life easily whatever the system you have in the country. And this country can not provide any good job and money; therefore, we depend on foreign job, either army or civil'. One Pun Magar who was listening quietly to the conversation, opined that 'without peace and tranquility life would be difficult regardless of your wealth and status,. therefore, we need democracy'. Although they did not oppose the view, they considered money as a crucial element in their lives. While researcher delivered this conversation to a 45 year old intellectual Magar activist in Pokhara then he said 'ethnic groups like Gurung and Magar have no political awareness and knowledge due to the lack of education and proper socialisation. Consequently, most of them consider income, the British-Gurkha service or civil job in developed countries very important. These trends are not only found among the Gurungs and Magars, but among all educated young whether they are high caste hill groups or other ethnic groups. However, during the climax of the *janandolan*, ethnic people, particularly Gurungs and Magars in Pokhara, participated through the banners and flags of their ethnic organisations formally declaring that they were in favour of the democratic movement.

During the procession, the researcher met a 25 year old Magar woman in Pokhara, who said she was from Sukumbasi tole (landless settlement). In a query why she was there, she responded that she was there at the request of her friends. She hoped along with peace and development, jobs would be available in democratic regime (*Prajatantra Aaepachhi Santi ra Bikas Hunchha Ani Kam Painchha*). Her view was similar with another a 40 year old activist, who also participated in the *Andolan*. The slogan 'Gas, Bas ra Kapas (food, shelter and cloth) has influence the poor people, therefore, every moment it becomes the major demand. He hoped that democracy is the only way to solve the problems through rights to livelihood, food, shelter and cloth (*kam ko adhikar, khana paune adhikar, basobasko adhikar ra lagauna paune adhikar*). These are the basic and foremost primary necessities for human beings to survive which are considered only in democracy. These views represent not only the poor ethnic strata but almost unemployed young generation from all groups. They believed that political parties would be in power in democracy and they would collectively perform in favour of the people in general. However, the researcher had noticed that many young Magars and their activists had actively participated in the April 2006 movement through their different organisations. Police used the tear gass and *lathi* charged to stop the ethnic protest. Some of the ethnic people had

experienced such event for the first time in their life and criticised the state personnel for their heavy handedness. Following quantitative data reveals the inspiring causes for their participation in the April, 2006 revolution:

Table No. 6.2

If Yes, Why did you participate in the people's movement-2062/63 (April, 2006)?

	Voters				Activists			
	Kaski	Myagdi	Palpa	Total	Kaski	Myagdi	Palpa	Total
For democracy	28 75.7%	38 84.4%	33 100%	99 86.1%	19 86.3%	22 95.6%	19 100%	60 93.7%
Called by political party	13 35.1%	16 35.5%	21 63.6%	50 43.5%	5 22.7%	11 47.8%	14 73.7%	30 46.9%
Request by friends/relatives	7 18.9%	7 15.5%	11 33.3%	25 21.7%	3 13.6%		2 10.5%	5 7.8%
Sent by Maoist	5 13.5%	30 66.7%	4 12.1%	39 33.9%	1 4.5%	10 12.3%	2 10.5%	13 20.3%
Request by ethnic organizations	14 37.8%	5 11.1%	7 21.2%	26 22.6%	15 68.2%	7 30.4%	9 47.3%	31 48.4%
Do not know	3 8.1%	1 2.2%		4 3.5%				
Total Respondents	37 189.1%	45 215.4%	33 240.2%	115 211.3%	22 195.3%	23 186.1%	19 242.0%	64 217.1%

Percent based on multiple responses.

Source: Field Survey, 2006.

Table no. 6.2 shows that majority of the Magars, both - commoners (86 percent) and activists (around 94 percent) - stated that democracy was the major cause of their involvement in *janandolan-II*. But secondly, voters from Kaski gave priority to their ethnic organisation and political party, from Myagdi they prefer to the Maoist party and the political party is the inspiring factor for their participation in the movement stated by the voters from Palpa. Whilst, accordingly the above mentioned table activists stress to request made by the ethnic organisations followed by the political parties respectively. Undoubtedly, activists particularly from Kaski than Palpa and Myagdi like to give credit to their ethnic organisations, whereas, the activists from Palpa followed by the Myagdi rather than Kaski prefer to the political party as consider their affiliation with their institutions very important. However, it seems that Magars participated in the April revolution because they either wanted democracy, or

political parties and ethnic organisations requested them to be part of such movement, or friends and relatives or Maoists made such requests.

Indeed, people at the grass roots level wanted peace and tranquility during the war between the state and Maoists. A Magar woman activist from Baranja said that she was much worried by the Maoist conflict. She thought that ‘democracy is the only way for resolving the conflict and managing peace and stability in the country and their village’. Therefore, due to this reason she joined the April 2006 revolution. Researcher also found such sentiments while he made short talk with some of the Magar participants during the movement. A 50 year old Magar from Ram Bazaar said that he was involved in the movement because of the request made by his ethnic organisation for democracy. He further said that there were many other Magars who participated in the movement for the first time in their life because of the request made by their Magar ethnic organisation in order to seek democracy and ethnic rights. In his view ‘democracy is the only way to resolve the conflict and establish peace and development through which they could successfully mobilise ethnic people in seeking proportional representation in state affairs along with recognition of ethnic identities’. Likewise, a 48 year old activist in Pokhara said that he and his relatives participated in *Janandolan* for seeking democracy. Their reason to participate was, ‘if there is democracy then Maoists will be in power and they will not asked donation’.

A chairman at the NMA-preliminary committee in Pokhara, Kaski told the researcher that ‘he requested his friends, relatives and neighbors to take active part in the movement for democracy. He fully hoped that it would be driven by the major political parties through consociation. After that, Maoist would be in power and they would not have to worry about the big amount of donation which was contributed on a regular basis personally and collectively’. Likewise, some Magar activists from Somadi village of Palpa and Baranja of Myagdi told the researcher that they were in favour of Maoist party. Accordingly them non of the parliamentary party could deliver better government besides Manmohan government in 1994; almost all government in post 1990 democracy were involved in corruption and bad governance. They hoped that Maoist is a new party which could do more welfare work in favour of the general people. Likewise, through a group discussion in Aulo of the Histan VDC-Myagdi, most of they said that ‘there is the way in democracy through which Maoist will govern the country, because general people like this party’. However, almost all people and most of the activists who were involved in the April revolution argued in their interviews that they fully participated in the April movement in order to achieve full democracy and resolve the Maoist conflict.

Mukti Rokka, a senior Magar activist in Beni bazaar of Myagdi district also actively participated in *Janandolan* –II. He told in his interview that he participated in the movement to seek democracy with the hope that it might solve the Maoist conflict for ever. He was much worried from the war, violence and instability as well as insecurity. He further said that as a civilized and political knowledgeable citizen, he was actively involved in the movement himself. He was one of the active members of the Magar ethnic group. Therefore, without consulting their central organisation they were involved and urged the Magar people at local level to participate in the movement for democracy. Nar Kumari Pun told in her interview that ‘for seeking democracy, the peaceful demonstration was more powerful than the Maoist warfare’. The democratic parties (seven parties’ alliance) urged them to participate in the *Andolan*. Therefore, she along with other Magars fully participated and organised the mass rallies against the authoritative monarchy in order to seek full and genuine democracy. It seemed that she was confident that the Magars would have more representatives in the Magar dominant districts. For her genuine democracy meant inclusive democracy. Similar views were found among other activists, like Damar Purja Magar, Ram Bahadur Thapa, Mana Maya Pun and others in Beni Bazaar.

Although people at the local level were politically socialised to their value and role in democracy through the Maoist war, the 19 day long *Janandolan*-II once proved that ‘the people are the ultimate sovereign in a democracy’. This movement proved once again in Nepal, that the peaceful demonstrations were more effective achieving in democracy through which unpopular system and regime could be changed. It proved people are the sovereign and they can use it in time and context for seeking democracy which was strong rather than the violence and the war that could not achieve its goal through 10 years of ‘people’s war’ with casualties of around 12 thousand people. However, the war favoured the ecological atmosphere and increased the participant political culture at the grass roots by socialising them with the values of anti-traditional state and rulers, which ultimately supported the *Janandolan*-II. Undoubtedly, the political parties and ethnic organisations had played a significant role for creating an atmosphere in favour of democratic movement. Hence, the agreement between seven parties’ alliance and Maoist party in pre- movement along with active support of the ethnic and other civil organisations ultimately led the mass movement and succeeded to restore democracy in 2006.

6.4 Magar Understanding of Democracy

If democracy does not stabilise, it will remain in a transitional phase, where ethnic and other cleavages emerge in the form of political conflicts. Therefore, democracy is

almost defined either through the sense of normative values or through immediate experiences rather than deliberately conceptualised terms. It seems that almost all the activists prefer the former concept, whereas the commoners or voters favour the latter concept. It is because, activists are well known with principle of democracy, whereas, it is defined with the expectations and experiences in day to day life by the people in general. However, a value-laden concept like democracy empirically may mean different things to different people. A recent survey by the State of Democracy in Nepal (Hachhethu 2004; 2008) reveals that democracy is still an elusive and also fragile concept to most of the common Nepalese. In comparison to this study, large numbers of Magars define democracy as a principle in terms of liberty and equality. Some other Magars define it as the people's government and party system, followed by terminology of peace, security, employment and development as well as a form of inclusion and rule of law. On the contrary, some have no ideas on democracy and some others understand it in a negative sense, in terms of conflict and instability.

People at the local level believe that 'democracy is a solution for all types of conflict and violence, and it is also the way to peace and development. And its more inclusive form accommodates the various interests of the power seekers political and ethnic forces'. Hence, some believed that 'due to transparent and basic human rights, it is the only system where people express their voices and grievances'. In deed, the nature of openness and provision of basic human rights, the oppressed and deprived grievances of subordinate group are spring up in democracy and these could be transferred into violence and conflict when dominant group fail to resolve properly (Esman, 1995; Hachhethu, 2003; Lawoti, 2005). In Nepal, particularly during the post 1990 democratic era, people experienced corruption, faulty governance and unnatural games for power and authority from political parties. Political parties are regarded as the nerve system of democracy, but they have not played their role properly rather have weakened institutionalisation of democracy (Baral, 2004). Despite the unsatisfactory role performed by the political parties, most of the Magars perceived democracy positively.

Undoubtedly, surrounding ecology has a major role in shaping the beliefs and ideas through which people evaluate and expect from the government and political system. Moreover, people in rural areas, who have faced conflict in their daily lives during the war time, tend to view democracy as a peaceful settlement of conflict in comparison to people in urban areas. They want basic human rights in terms of liberty and equality in order to avoid any threats. Hence, as the unprivileged ethnic group some of them obtain proper representation in authority and resources. Some young Magar

activists of rural parts of Myagdi and Palpa believed that the meaning of democracy is their empowerment in state and they further stated that it would be possible only in Maoist ruled. But, some women activists from the same village said ‘we need democracy to speak and to walk by our own desire whereas such things were not allowed during the Maoist conflict’. A president of *Aama Samuha* in one village of Myagdi further stated that ‘during the time, we had to obey Maoist order whether we liked it or not’⁶². Those who did not like the Maoists activities expressed similar types of the views in other rural parts of the field areas.

On the contrary, most of the activists who favoured the Maoist and MNLF stated that if the Maoists party would have the full power to govern the country, then full equality and liberty would be achieved for the general people. Particularly the voices of the poor and low strata of the people had been ignored in the local polity and almost they were dominated by traditional elites. Hence, as the subordinate group they seem in favour of the opposition politics which may expect for addressing their grievances. Therefore, this stratum of the people at the local level defined democracy as Maoist government where they could be represented from the side of marginalised and excluded people. Indeed, the grievances of the excluded and unprivileged people at the local level sprang out due to the Maoist influence (Karki and Bhattarai, 2004, Thapa, 2005; de sales, 2002). However, it seems that those who are positively considered the Maoist war believe that the Maoist party should have the ruling power in democratic government, because it represents the voices of the marginal and excluded people. They further believe that ‘the genuine democracy is only possible when the power and resources of the state are distributed among the different groups of people without any discrimination such as caste, ethnicity, gender, class and geography’. The discourses of such versions can be concluded that due to lack of genuine and inclusive democracy, conflicts existed in the name of Maoist insurgency and ethnic rebellion.

On the other side, some activists at the local level could not support the undemocratic activities of the Maoist. Therefore, they preferred the definition of democracy as liberty and equality for living independently without being imposed of any value or threat by any side, whether state or Maoist. Those activists did not believe in the Maoist ideology could not oppose their inhumane and injustice activities due to the

⁶² Interviews with 40 year old women activists in Baranja and Histan village of Myagdi district. Both said in their language, ‘*prajatantrama aphno ikchale bolna ra hiddul garna painchha jabaki maobadi dondako belame hamro ichha nabhaepani uniharule bhaneko dar dhmkile garda sabai mannuparthau*’ -2063/8/12; 2063/5/24.

threat of *jankarbahi*⁶³ at the local rural village. They said in their interviews ‘although, they also participated at some Maoist programmes in many places but they still believed in their previous political ideology instead of the Maoist’. Likewise, if we take the example of Baranja village, where there was extreme conflict during the peoples’ war time, people were not ready to talk openly with researcher in their interviews during the first visit after immediate success of April revolution. But when the researcher came again after three months, villagers felt much comfortable; therefore, they were ready to express their perceptions towards democracy and various political issues. Hence, the researcher got an opportunity to participate in a ceremony where the activists from all political ideologies and the people in general were gathered. This function was organised by the electric power user group of Baranja VDC in order to celebrate the process of digging the first poles of electricity as a development activity in their village for the first time since last ten years. Most of the people to whom researcher talked during the function said that ‘their and their village’s ‘first need is peace and development’ and they believed that this will be possible only through democracy’. They expected and hoped ‘it would be fulfilled in coming days along with the peace negotiation in between state and the Maoists and among the political parties’. However, as the positive or negative effective of the Maoist mobilisation, it seemed that people at rural villages are aware of political education and significance of democratic values.

The opinions regarding to democracy expressed by the ethnic activists, particularly in the urban centers, were much guided by ethnic politics rather than political ideology that are found in rural one. A senior activist in Pokhara told in his interview that ‘democracy is an open system through which we can articulate our interest. We the *janajati* people, can forward our demands in the democratic government and hope to get inherent ethnic rights and this is possible only in a democracy’⁶⁴. Next senior activist forwarded his view that ‘democracy is concerned with more ethnic liberty and equality that cannot be achieved in any authoritarian system or one party dictatorship’⁶⁵. He further said that ‘along with practicing liberty and equality in democracy, we can articulate our ethnic interests, to which the efforts should be concentrated by the democratic government.’ Some other activists related with MNLF defined democracy as the peoples’ government in where the liberty and equality are

⁶³ During the Maoist conflict, Maoist executed the punishment as big donation, beating, looting crops and physical properties, exile and even death penalty in the name of the *Jankarbahi* (so called people’s action) to those who were alleged to spy for government or who were in against to the Maoist party and its activities.

⁶⁴ An interview with Surendra Thapa Magar, an advisor of NMA-Kaski, 2063/7/8.

⁶⁵ An interview with Jak Bahadur Tahapa Magar, The chairman of the NMA, 2063/10/7.

preserved for all oppressed and suppressed people including Magar group. However, through above mentioned discussions shows that if there is responsible and inclusive governance of the different strata of the people composed by their popular participation, then that is true democracy where real liberty and equality, for the people can be expected. Likewise, equality means seeking participation in the polity through the struggle for inclusion which is possible only in democracy. On the grounds whether people in Nepal can achieve liberty and equality through democracy or not, it is not so easy to predict. However, liberty and equality are founding principles of democracy. To quest and vanguard as well as the implementation of liberty and equality is the symbol of the survival and sustainability of democracy.

The Magar either activists or general voters perceived more or less similar beliefs on democracy as the facts are disclosed through qualitative or quantitative methods of data collection. Following table reveals the quantitative out puts of their understanding of democracy.

Table No. 6.3
What do you mean by democracy?

	Voters				Activists			
	Kaski	Myagdi	Palpa	Total	Kaski	Myagdi	Palpa	Total
Liberty and equality	45 45.0%	59 59.0%	55 55.0%	159 53.0%	19 76.0%	17 68.0%	6 24.0%	42 56.0%
People's representative government and party system	13 13.0%	7 7.0%	20 20.0%	40 13.3%	4 16.0%	4 16.0%	13 52.0%	21 28.0%
Rule of law	6 6.0%	-	1 1.0%	7 2.3%	2 8.0%	1 4.0%	-	3 4.0%
Inclusiveness	3 3.0%	5 5.0%	2 2.0%	10 3.3%	-	-	2 8.0%	2 2.7%
Peace, security and development	5 5.0%	8 8.0%	6 6.0%	19 6.3%	-	3 12.0%	4 16.0%	7 9.3%
Republic system	-	1 1.0%	-	1 0.3%	-	-	-	-
Conflict and instability (negative sense)	2 2.0%	4 4.0%	1 1.0%	7 2.3%	-	-	-	-
Do not know	26 26.0%	16 16.0%	15 15.0%	57 19.0%	-	-	-	-
Total	100 100%	100 100%	100 100%	300 100.0%	25 100.0%	25 100.0%	25 100.0%	75 100.0%

Source: Field Survey, 2006.

As per the above table, majority of the people believe in democracy because of liberty and equality. Almost all define democracy as the right to say, right to move, right to

freedom, right to live irrespective of ideology, gender, caste and ethnicity⁶⁶. Likewise, according to the table no. 6.3, some Magars prefer party system in which the government is established through peoples' representatives followed by peace, security and development in their meaning of democracy. Due to affiliation with political parties, activists seem more in favour of this statement rather than voters in general. During the Maoist conflict, there was no freedom and peace, people in the rural areas obliged to do in accordance with Maoist activists, hence, state personnel also hindered their independent life. They wanted normal life like before the conflict; that is why they were eager to see full democracy in their places and the state. Therefore, people from rural areas stressed that democracy means liberties and equalities, and peace and development (Appendix 6). Table no. 6.3 also shows that only 19 percent out of the total 300 non-activists respondents said that either they do not know or they do not want to say anything about the meaning of democracy. However, the overwhelming majority of the Magar people have more knowledge about democracy, which ultimately leads to the positive political culture that is also helpful in the democratisation at the local level.

The overall presentations show that the meaning of democracy, however, more or less, is similar as almost deliberated by the western concept as borrowed system with its meaning. Although there are two ways to define it, substantive and process, democracy is defined as the process at regional level through the commonality. Likewise, some try to define democracy through substantive belief as the system should deliver basic needs and welfare to the people along with accountability, rule of law and inclusiveness. On the other side, some people believe democracy as the process of the government, party system, and liberty and equality. However, it seems that democracy is process, accountability and rule of law as emphasised by the white people is outweighed by some of its core principle i.e. liberty, equality and party system in the country where the democracy is in transition, like in Nepal⁶⁷.

The analysis above presents a picture of Magars perceptions on democracy. Most of them considered liberty and equality and peoples' representative institutions as normative and procedural concept of democracy. Available literature on democracy focuses mostly on institutions. Scholarly discussion on democracy and democratisation 'increasingly emphasise normative and procedural concerns' (Joseph Schumpeter, 1947 : 269, quoted by Bairly, 2000 : 3; Huntington 1989 : 6-7).

⁶⁶ The table is created by the views and attitudes that expressed by the Magar respondents through the open ended questionnaires, and shows what their understanding of democracy is in their own meaning and own priority.

⁶⁷ See in detail: Krishna Hachhethu, *State of Democracy in South Asia* 2004, 2008.

However, the normative and procedural form of democracy does not represent the various groups of people. Therefore, Diamond, Linz and Lipset (1995 : xvi) define democracy as a system of government that meets three essential conditions: meaningful competition, inclusive participation and civil and political liberties. Hence, in multiethnic democracy, this concept is meaningful because it considers fair and inclusive representation, and liberty and equality as institutional and procedural foundations of democracy. Magars' perception of democracy is also more or less similar.

Democracy itself is a fragile concept and Magars understand it in diverse forms. Some Magars particularly activists, define it in such a way that it appears similar to western concept. Accordingly, democracy denotes the principle form of liberty and equality as well as institutional structures such as party, government and elections. On the other hand, commoners associate democracy aggregately and deliberately to their day to day life *as bolne, hidne, kam paune, sabailaai saman garne, shanti-surksha, bikas ra sabaiko sashanma pratinidhitwa* (basic needs, liberty, equality and inclusiveness). On the grounds of democratic values people also evaluate the institutional performance of government too⁶⁸. The above presented qualitative and quantitative analysis justify that these concepts of democracy are largely found among the Magars⁶⁹.

The researcher has mentioned earlier that some Magars were politically aware and they participated in *janandolan-II* to restore democracy. Hence, a positive idea has evolved among the people at the local level that democracy is essential for developing the country through peace, stability and development. The chairman of NMA-Kaski said that 'democracy is needed not only for peace and development but also for the rights of ethnic people like the Magars, therefore, we the Magar leaders in Pokhara did not support the King's stepped on democracy'⁷⁰. He further said 'we the Magar people are marginalised in the polity, we can get more roles in the state affairs in proportion to our population, and we can promote our ethnic identity only in

⁶⁸ For instance, they judged that Man Mohan's government in 1994 was the best form of democratic government compared with other governments that were formed after 1990. Because it had delivered the activities of the public welfare and empowered the local government with providing the economic resources and decision making power through which the people in general actively participated in mobilising these resources and self-rule authority at the local level (see Appendix 5).

⁶⁹ Hence, a report deals that the attitudes of the Gurung and Madhesi ethnic groups have also delivered their views more or less similar with these concept of democracy (Hachhathu, 2008 : 34).

⁷⁰ The NMA-Kaski and its chairman in comparison with other ethnic groups like Gurung and Newar in Pokhara have the high moral status for advocating democracy. It is because; other ethnic leaders supported the king's step towards accretive monarchy with violating the democratic norms. Hence, some of them were involved in the welcome ceremony for the king, whereas, Magar leaders did not support the undemocratic performance of the king.

democracy, therefore, democracy is more essential for ethnic people’⁷¹. Likewise, an academican Magar in Pokhara forwarded his view, ‘people are vanguard of democracy as they believe that it is a system based on people and their interest’. However, the above discussion can be concluded that if the political elites perform the democracy along with respecting its norms and values towards the welfare of the people then it assets to increase the participant political culture among the people. Therefore, if they feel attached to democracy and consider it as their own system then people think that it is also a part of their daily life. But, the political parties and their leaders should be more democratic in terms of making their activities transparent, and consider distributing the state resources to marginal ethnic and other excluded groups of the population’⁷². Nevertheless, it can be found that Magars have more positive attitudes towards democracy. Following table states their perceptions towards democracy in Nepal.

Table No. 6.4
What is your evaluation towards democracy in Nepal?

	Voters				Activists	
	It is needed	It is not needed	Do not know	Total	It is needed	Total
Kaski district	80 80.0%		20 20.0%	100 100.0%	25 100%	25 100.0%
Lumle	19 82.6%		4 17.4%	23 100.0%	4 100%	4 100.0%
Nirmal Pokhari	21 95.5%		1 4.5%	22 100.0%	3 100%	3 100.0%
Pokhara	40 72.7%		15 27.3%	55 100.0%	18 100%	18 100.0%
Myagdi district	84 84.0%	1 1.0%	15 15.0%	100 100.0%	25 100%	25 100.0%
Baranja	31 73.8%	1 2.4%	10 23.8%	42 100.0%	5 100%	5 100.0%
Beni Bazar	5 100.0%			5 100.0%	11 100%	11 100.0%
Histan	48 90.6%		5 9.4%	53 100.0%	9 100%	9 100.0%
Palpa district	79 79.0%	1 1.0%	20 20.0%	100 100.0%	25 100%	25 100.0%
Pipal Danda	59 79.7%	1 1.4%	14 18.9%	74 100.0%	6 100%	6 100.0%
Somadi	15 71.4%		6 28.6%	21 100.0%	4 100%	4 100.0%
Tansen	5 100.0%			5 100.0%	15 100%	15 100.0%
Rural	193 82.1%	2 0.9%	40 17.0%	235 100.0%	31 100%	31 100.0%
Urban	50 76.9%		15 23.1%	65 100.0%	44 100%	44 100.0%
Total	243 81.0%	2 0.7%	55 18.3%	300 100.0%	75 100%	75 100.0%

Source: Field Study, 2006.

⁷¹ Interview with Krishna Bahadur Thapa Magar, Chairman of the NMA-Kaski, 2063/4/13, 2064/5/7.

⁷² Interview with Dr. Keshar Jung Baral Magar, as advisor to NMA and NMLF, 2063/2/5, 2064/1/5.

As per the table no. 6.4, democracy is a system which is needed for Nepali and Nepal. Almost all activists (100 percent) from different political parties are fully in favour of democracy. They think that it is the only system through which Nepal can achieve peace, stability and development forever. Likewise, 81 percent voters as general citizens have been found supporting democracy as they think that it is a system for overall development of the country. On the contrary, 0.7 percent people, mainly from the rural areas, expressed their views against democracy. Those who did not favour democracy argued that more instability and violent activities occurred in democracy compared to previous Panchayat system. A few people who were the pro-Panchayat system (1960-1990), particularly found in rural areas of Myagdi and Palpa, did not see the relevance of democracy rather they wanted to see assertive monarchy. A part from this view, all most all the activists and most of the commoners expected that the democratic system is more benefited the people rather than other despotic and authoritarian political system. Nevertheless, they perceived that people can exhibit their grievances and dissatisfactions in democracy due to its openness and support for human rights. They expect that true democracy is the only way to address various grievances and execute liberty, equality, and justice which helps to solve the voices and problems of people from minorities and marginal strata.

The greater number of people either from activists and urban areas or from non-activists and rural areas consider that true and full democracy is the only way for solving any grievances and the problems of day to day life of people at the grass roots. Hence, it is the only solution for various types of debate and conflict between the state and groups of people or among the groups themselves. Therefore, the concept of democracy is held to 'justify all the short-term difficulties and assumed to become an inevitable solution all over the world' (Huntington, 1996 : 96). This concept is shared by all the Magar people at the local level during the interview. They believe that the discourses and power sharing in democracy is the solution for the settlement of any disputes including Maoists and ethnic conflicts.

On the grounds of above mentioned discussion, briefly it seems that Magars strongly favoured democracy as it is the only way to seek various rights, representation, peace, development and to resolve the ethnic and Maoist conflict. Due to their positive beliefs and confidence towards democracy they actively participated in its restored movement called April (2006) revolution. In democracy, they can articulate and integrate their interests, perform the liberty and equality as part of their every day life since they were involved in the April revolution. Indeed, people's positive belief towards democracy helps to consolidate it, and hence it is said that, "Public

confidence' is a source of strength for any democracy" (Alam, 2004 : 7). Likewise, Magars have positive concept on democracy as the strong institution through which they expect the management of their common problems. Democracy is regarded as institutional form, along with the process as 'aggregative and deliberative concepts' (Young, 2000) that are found in the views of Magars at the local level. They gave the credit to democracy which helped to mobilise the Magar people towards their demands in seeking proper participation in the state affairs through the process of inclusion. Hence, they expected that change could be mentioned in the polity of the state through the inclusive democracy in order to accommodate the interests and grievances of the ethnic and marginalised groups of the people. For this as they believed traditional excluded nature of the state should be changed into inclusion of the deprived ethnic and other minority groups for their proper representation in the authority and resources of the state and society. Accordingly, in an ethnically divided state, "conflict management is only possible when the minority community has adopted a set of demands negotiable within the existing political system, and the majority community- or at least its leadership- is prepared to accommodate to some degree the demands of its ethno political minorities" (Rudolph, 2006 : 15)

6.5 Democracy Vs Monarchy

It is interesting to note that at the cost of democracy Magars at the grass roots do not want monarchy who has ruled over the centuries in Nepal. In relation to democracy and monarchy, the voters and activists both at the local level are strongly in favour of democracy instead of monarchy because they perceive that monarchy is negligible in the price of democracy. Almost all respondents from different groups said that democracy is needed in a country rather than monarchy and a king. Regarding this issue several factors shaped their views. The royal massacre was the first event that encouraged the anti-monarchial sentiments. General people at village thought and still think that the event occurred due to the then king Gyanendra and his son. Likewise, not only the political party, King was also unable to manage the Maoist conflict when he became active after February 2005. As a result, the mass demonstrations in April, 2006 exposed the anti monarchial sentiment. Therefore, the mainstream political parties and most of the political activists defined the Republic Democracy as the major theme that was carried out by the people in general during the *janandolan* –II. Therefore, the popularity of the king decreased rapidly and ultimately the overall political ecology favoured a republican democracy.

Apart from this political ecology, the communist parties, who harbour republican principles, had a decisive role in disseminating the anti-monarchial values among the

people including Magars. A senior activist in Pokhara stated in his interview that the royal massacre of king Birendra in 2002 was also the main reason for cultivating anti-monarchical feeling. People felt that the king is outdated and should be replaced. Hence, the extra constitutional step taken by king Gyanendra in 2005 again increased the anti-monarchical sentiment and such sentiment disseminated rapidly at the grass roots level during the mass movement in April, 2006. Therefore, most Magars who were either influenced by the communist ideology or Nepali Congress, and were closer to the parties that used to be pro-monarchy such as Janamukti and RPP, did not want to see any form of kingship either active or constitutional. In Myagdi, a 60 year old local activist of RPP forwarded his view that previously he was strong supporter of the king and at that time he never could think state without king would be possible even for a minute. But later he changed his idea with the beginning of the Maoist insurgency. Particularly after killing of king Birendra and his family, he felt that the king and monarchy did not do well for the country. Therefore, it could be replaced with a republic. Similar arguments were found among some of the activists of Janamukti and RPP in Kaski and Palpa.

In addition to these views, some activists forwarded their views that monarchy was the cause for their century long exploitation, deprivation and suppression through the domination of the high hill castes, Nepali language and Hindu religion. As a result, they were unprivileged and excluded in the polity of the state. Hence, they lost their language and their aboriginal religion; as a result their ethnic identity was in crises. Due to these reasons, they do not like to see any form of the monarchical rule in the country⁷³. The following table states the arguments of the Magars towards the future of the Monarchy in Nepal.

⁷³ An interview with Jhak Bahadur Thapa Magar (Kaski), the Chairman of NMA in 2063/11/10, Lok Bahadur Thapa Magar(Kaski), an adviser of the MNLF in 2063/5/7, Nar Kumari Pun (Myagdi), political leader of Myagdi, in 2063/6/22, and Bhadra Bahadur Thapa Magar (Palpa), a member in interim parliament, in 2063/10/5.

Table No. 6.5

What is your opinion towards monarchy?

	Voters					Activists			
	Ceremonial monarchy	Absolute monarchy	Republic democracy	Do not know	Total	Ceremonial monarchy	Republic democracy	Do not know	Total
Kaski District	23 23.0%	1 1.0%	52 52.0%	24 24.0%	100 100.0%	8 32.0%	17 68.0%		25 100.0%
Lumle	5 21.7%		14 60.9%	4 17.4%	23 100.0%	1 25.0%	3 75.0%		4 100.0%
Nirmal Pokhari	1 4.5%		18 81.8%	3 13.6%	22 100.0%		3 100%		3 100.0%
Pokhara	17 30.9%	1 1.8%	20 36.4%	17 30.9%	55 100.0%	7 38.9%	11 61.1%		18 100.0%
Myagdi District	9 9.0%	1 1.0%	61 61.0%	29 29.0%	100 100.0%	1 4.0%	24 96.0%		25 100.0%
Baranja	5 11.9%	1 2.4%	16 38.1%	20 47.6%	42 100.0%		5 100%		5 100.0%
Beni Bazar			4 80.0%	1 20.0%	5 100.0%	1 9.1%	10 90.9%		11 100.0%
Histan	4 7.5%		41 77.4%	8 15.1%	53 100.0%		9 100%		9 100.0%
Palpa District	19 19.0%	5 5.0%	58 58.0%	18 18.0%	100 100.0%	3 12.0%	21 84.0%	1 4.0%	25 100.0%
Pipal Danda	17 23.0%	5 6.8%	42 56.8%	10 13.5%	74 100.0%	1 16.7%	5 83.3%		6 100.0%
Somadi	1 4.8%		12 57.1%	8 38.1%	21 100.0%	1 25.0%	2 50.0%	1 25.0%	4 100.0%
Tansen	1 20.0%		4 80.0%		5 100.0%	1 6.7%	14 93.3%		15 100.0%
Total	51 17.0%	7 2.3%	171 57.0%	71 23.7%	300 100.0%	12 16.0%	62 82.7%	1 1.3%	75 100.0%

Source: Field Survey, 2006.

According to the above table no. 6.5, an overwhelming majority of activists (around 83 percent) supported republican democracy followed by the 57 percent voters. Whilst, around 24 percent voters and 1 percent activists (together 19.2 percent respondents) do not like to state their views in this regard. On the other, 17 percent voters and 16 percent activists (15 percent in total) together supported a form of constitutional monarchy and very few (less than 2 percent) still favoured of an active monarchy. Most of these respondents were non-activists, particularly from the rural areas rather than urban centers. None of the activists seem to be in favour an absolute monarchy. Likewise, well educated young generation from Myagdi and Palpa districts which were influenced by the Maoist war were much in favour of the republican

democracy (see Appendix 6). Hence, the people who believed in Hindu religion and from rural parts were also increasingly supporting the republic rather than monarchy.

As per the table no. 6.5, it seems that there are still 17 percent voters and 16 percent activists who support ceremonial monarchy. Those who exhibit such sentiments argue that ‘monarchy has contributed a lot in the formation of the Nepali state. King is the only symbol of national unity and is above party conflict and interests. Hence powerless king can do no wrong, therefore, we respect him’. Along with these views of general Magars, some activists in Pokhara also liked monarchy. Two senior elder Magar activists in Pokhara said that they thought ‘the king is an unchallenged institution because it has contributed to the foundation of modern Nepal’. According to them, ‘the monarchy at least in the form of ceremonial head is essential for unity and integrity of Nepal’. Although the political ecology was firmly anti-monarchial, the table no. 6.5 shows that some general Magars in Pipladanda of Palpa, Pokhara of Kaski and Baranja of Myagdi seemed to support a powerful king and an absolute monarchy. Such people put forward their views that the king and monarchy had a long and ancient history which could rule the country through stability, peace and development. Such views were expressed when the researcher asked them as why they wanted absolute monarchy. An NC activist in Pipal Danda of Palpa, who was around 60 year old, said that if there was the king’s rule, then there would be peace and order which can not be expected in the multiparty system due to power struggle and vested interests of political parties. Likewise, same views were forwarded by a 50 year old adult woman in Pokhara and a 65 year old man in Baranja as only two commoners who supported absolute monarchy in Kaski and Myagdi respectively out of two hundred survey respondents. Besides the view, majority of the activists and commoners were against the monarchy in Nepal.

Broadly, it was found that the people at the local level had very negative images of the King and monarchy⁷⁴. On the contrary, in the next part of the world, one research showed that the King was associated with the term democracy, articulated by even well educated people⁷⁵ (Al-Jarrah and Cullingford, 2007). In Nepal, democracy has been victimized time and again, mainly due to the intervention by the King since its

⁷⁴ Some believed that the King and his son are the main villains that made the conspiracy to kill the whole family of the immediate King Briendra, while some others think that the King and his relatives are the smugglers involved in many legal and illegal businesses. Some thought that there was much conflict and violence during the direct rule of the King and that those who respected the King became depressed due to inefficiency in controlling and maintaining peace and security in the state during his direct rule too.

⁷⁵ Out of 1000 students that were interviewed at Jordan University, Jordan, 555 said that democracy means their King Abdullah.

establishment in 1950 or its restoration in 1990. This is why, not only the activists, but even the people at the grass roots level, suppose that the King is the main obstacle for success and a stable democracy in Nepal. Likewise, some Magar activists thought that 'If there is no king and monarchy, then there will be no monopoly and dominance of the high hill Hindu elites'. Then democracy will embrace more inclusive and welfare oriented policies for the Nepali people irrespective of any caste, religion, region and group'⁷⁶. Hence, some activists close to MNLF expressed their view as 'ethnic people have been deprived from rights over their territory and they lost their language and culture because of the monarchical feudalism and Hinduism that should have been replaced with real democracy. Ethnic people will be sovereign only when ethnic rights are established over their territory and resources and they will be able to participate in state affairs in proportion to their population'⁷⁷. The King and his institution monarchy have been replaced by the republic system declared by the first meeting of the CA in June 2008. In democracy, sovereign power of the country is vested in the people, who proved in Nepal that the king yielded to the people's power and along with execution of the republic state he became a general citizen.

6.6 Conclusion

Magar people in the villages are politically educated compared to the people lining in urban areas. Most of the people have positive attitudes towards democracy. It is found that people are pro-democratic and they are very eager to see peace and development in their country. Democracy is needed for the society and state through which it can fulfil their parochial as well as wider expectations. In Magar understanding people's government, human rights, peace, development, rule of law and inclusion in the polity are the aggregative and deliberative meaning of democracy. In addition, they think that the ethnic and excluded strata of the population should be empowered in the polity with provision of their basic ethnic rights. In this process, they perceive that they should also have proportional representation in the power and resources of state at the central and local decision making bodies through democratic government. They also believe that in peaceful and prosperous society which could be established in a multiethnic context through their full participation in resources and power of the state with their identity recognized in an inclusive process of consociational democracy.

⁷⁶ According to the interviews with senior Magar activists such as Kaser Jung Baral Magar, Krishan Bahadur Thapa Magar, Pradeep Pun Magar, Amar Rokka Magar, Nar Kumari Pun Magar.

⁷⁷ Interview with Sures Ale and Lok Bahadur Thapa Magar, advisors of MNLF, in 2063/11/9 and 2063/5/7 respectively.

The Maoists' war and mobilisation of the people in the democratic movement (April, 2006) helped to increase and extend Magars' knowledge on democracy and ethnic values. Magars in general have been seeking more roles in the polity of the state with their ethnic identity through the mobilisation by NEFIN and the various Magar organisations with the advent of 1990 democracy. Moreover, during the April (2006) revolution, these processes and institutional practices played a key role making democracy populist in terms of seeking inclusive democracy as an alternative means of its traditional liberal form. However, Magars at local level are more or less able to get political and ethnic education through ethnic activism conducted in a democracy though it could not extend over Magars in various rural parts. The activities of political parties and community based organisations have bridged any gaps that existed in between democracy and Magars at the grassroots level. However, the mobilisations of the ways in which Magar people produce and reproduce their ethnic, cultural and social relationships through ethnic, social and political organisations, and the ways in which such organisations are connected with larger political and social movements to engage people in decision making processes, can provide Magars at the general level with an understanding of an alternative process of democratisation in politics. Ethnic and other conflicts are expected to be resolved in consensus among the dominant and subordinate groups through democratic inclusion. Undoubtedly, such processes can help to strengthen the institutionalisation of the state and democracy.

On the other side, people have much expectation from democracy and most of the activists believed that democracy and its inclusive form is the only way to resolve ethnic and political conflicts. It seems that almost all Magars at local level want to see effective performances of democracy as peace, stability and development along with more inclusion and wide political participation of the marginal ethnic and other excluded minority groups in the polity. Therefore, it needs more inclusive and welfare policies in democracy in order to recognise multicultural characters of society and multi-ethnic politics which are not normally expected in the traditional type of liberal democracy. In traditional liberal democracy, democracy denotes rule of majority and people's government established through regular elections. Nepali democratic experiences in the past before *janandolan-II* were found to be close to it. Likewise, in multiethnic and heterogeneous societies, it does not mean that all have access to the polity through a traditional process of institutional practices like the first –past –the post system, which is appropriate for only two-three contesting ethnic groups or a homogeneous society. On the contrary, in multiethnic and multicultural countries, through this method, only those elites from major ethnicity, dominate the resources

and power, and subordinate groups do not have adequate access to the polity of state and they are excluded from power and resources (Lijpart 1977, 1995; Esman 1994). And it is also said that, “when the state is captured by the dominant class, it is less likely to promote democracy” (Ruescheneyer et al. 1992: 64). In reverse, multiculturalism promotes prosperous democracy where all strata of population have access to resources and power of the state. Therefore, disadvantaged ethnic and other excluded groups of the people in Nepal participated in the democratic movement (Janandolan) and since then they have been demanding their proportional representation in the polity and state affairs along with their ethnic identity. It will be possible when traditional liberal democracy turns to inclusive form as consociational model and all segments of the population including Magar enjoy power and resources of the state instead of the monopoly by the elites from traditional ruling class and high caste groups.

Most of the ethnic activists have alleged that the elites from the high caste hill group have dominated them. Magar and other minority groups think that they are deprived and unprivileged in the resources and the power of the state. However, such process has created obstacles to strengthen and consolidate democracy. Therefore, democracy can be revisited as inclusive, participatory as well as effective and welfare oriented system for the people at the grassroots level. Democracy would be substantially meaningful when all strata of population have good access to the resource and affairs of the state in terms of the empowerment of different ethnic groups. It is consociational democracy through which it can be allocated for all segments of power seeking ethnic groups in the polity of the state with their identity. This is why democracy prevails in multiculturalism where consensus is promoted through consociationalism or power sharing, instead of absolute majoritarian liberal democracy where a few elites from dominated group have hegemony and monopoly over ruling power in the state.

CHAPTER VII

MAGARS AND POLITICAL PARTIES: BLENDING OF IDEOLOGY AND ETHNICITY

7.1 Political Party, Democracy and the Magars

Contemporary Nepali politics stands witness to the rise of ethnicity. Magar is no exception. So, ethnic mobilisation has become one of the dominant parts of competitive party politics in the country. This leads to a broader definition and scope of political parties beyond the conventional western notion and traditional ideology centric understanding of political parties in South Asia. The conventional notion is that democracy is sustainable only in prosperous and industrialized nations. But democracy in the South Asian region, however, has developed despite low level of economic development and literacy rate. Democracy is anti-thesis to dictatorship in South Asia. In this regard, Suri's observation can be taken as a representative statement.

“Democracy in the region is interspersed by authoritarian interludes and is shaky in some countries at times. As a caveat to this exceptionalism, it may also be noted that, while democratic politics has been sustained on the whole, the low level of development has placed a tremendous strain on the polity and parties in the region and has even impaired them” (Suri, 2007 : 21).

Understanding democracy as an opposite to dictatorship is more distinct in Nepal. In Nepal, democracy has been in crisis ever since its establishment in 1951, as have political parties, mainly because of the King's ambitions to be ruled an assertive monarchy. Indeed, in the evolutionary process, the party system was abolished in December 1960 when King Mahendra banned all political parties through a royal coup. Among several political parties that emerged before and after the 1950-51 revolution, only eleven parties were registered for the 1959 general election, only two of them, the NC and some splinter group of the CPN, survived in the Panchayat period; many disappeared and a few new parties came into existence since then. The restoration of democracy in 1990 through *janandolan -I* was followed by a mushrooming of political parties, although only a few existed in a functional sense as they were able to participate in the electoral process. The King again interfered in 2002 and stepped in directly in 2005 to seek an active role and to exploit the internal and external conflicts of the political parties. Around one and a half decades after the restoration of democracy in 1990, the images of the political parties have risen and fallen in line with their performances. However, the recovery of their popularity with the people led

to the janandolan II (April, 2006 revolution) and reestablished democracy that was usurped by the King a few years earlier. Political parties in a democracy have been regarded as the formal process of articulating and integrating the interests of various groups of society. Besides, these are the institutions of political socialisation and mobilisation as well as the platform for political activism and development. However, along with the establishment of political parties in Nepal, the traditional and parochial political culture gradually changed when people were exposed to new ideas of social and political changes.

Since the unification of Nepal, the high caste hill group had been dominated the state and society for a long through a process of acculturation and sanskritisation, therefore, *janajatis* had been disadvantaged in matters of education and political awareness. Due to the control of high caste hill group elites over state power, the Nepali language and Hindu culture have been privileged at the expense of ethnic language and cultural identity. Therefore, it had been excluded large segments of the population. In response to this, ethnic activism had been led occasional revolts which were repressed by the state (Gurung, 1995; Serchan, 2055). Political affiliation was not easy for the *janajatis* and the Magars because the state had been under the control of rigid traditional Hindu rulers and tyrannical regimes for a long time. However, parties are the product of their society and a composite social culture. As the top rank in the Hindu social hierarchy and the traditional rulers, the high caste hill group has dominated most of Nepali society and its political parties either. Therefore, the ethnic groups, including Magars, have been found to be engaged in active politics with their identity while they have been subjugated and their language, religion and culture are deterred.

The nationalities (*janajatis*) particularly, Gurung, Magar, Rai and Limbu having military background in Nepal and British India had contributed significantly in the movement for democracy which was initiated by Nepali Congress against the Rana Oligarchy from 1948 to 1951. Some Magars affiliated with NC - Padam Ale through the constituency no. 102 (Tanahun) and Giri Prasad Budhathoki from no. 89 (Gulmi) - got representative seats in the HoR that was formed in 1959. In Panchayati era, when political liberties were banned, politics was solely governed by the monarchy with the support of a group of people called Pancha who were actively involved in so-called party-less Panchayati politics. Some Magars, particularly from Myagdi, Gulmi and Rolpa districts, were represented in the Rastriya Panchayat. During the 30-year Panchayati era, only a small number of Magars had the opportunity to become the members of legislature. In comparison to the total Magar population their representation in the Panchayat parliament was very small. Most of the time, non-Magar groups represented the Magar-dominated districts like Palpa, Myagdi, Syangja, Tanahun, Baglung, etc. Among the Magar representations, some members were

nominated in national Panchayat by the King, and a few of them had this opportunity a number of times.

Political activities increased with the restoration of democracy in 1990 with its open political system. Around 100 political parties flourished, but only three Magars gained seats in parliament through the general election of 1991. Furthermore, since then neither Magar was represented in the central structure of the mainstream political parties such as NC and UML nor any Magar leader had an opportunity to become minister in the parties' governments. Likewise, no Magar was found in a major post of the bureaucracy of Nepal (See chapter Three). Nevertheless, due to associate with Shah Rulers and traditional Nepali state in the past, Magars had been played a significant role in politics, and they acted as warriors who assisted in the unification of the Nepali state. On the other hand, now Magars, particularly from the West Kham region, have greatly contributed to the Maoist war. Therefore, in comparison to the other major political parties, Magars have been found significantly representing in the Maoist party. Hence, in the most recent CA election many Magar activists received candidacies from various political parties, and among them some were successful to be CA members, particularly through the Maoist party. The rise of ethnicity opens up possibility of forming ethnic based party in the future. In the mean time, as suggested by the result of the CA, the mainstream parties including the Maoist, which were framed as secular and ethnic at the time of their inception, seem to have successfully mobilised ethnicity both in contents and process.

7.2 Participation of Magars in the Political Parties at the Local Level

The relationship between Magar and political parties is not encouraging in terms of representation in proportion to the strength of their population. Along with dominating major institutions of the state, the high caste hill group, Brahmin- Chhetri and Newar ethnicity have also been dominating political parties. Since the Magars are an underprivileged and excluded ethnic group, their participation in mainstream political parties or central organisations with the decisive role in distributing state resources and making public policy, has been found to be either nil or negligible (see in detail chapter IV). Likewise, their participation in district- level party organisations follows the same pattern as those at the central level. As per the following table, Magar representation in the political parties of Kaski, Myagdi and Palpa, except in the Maoist controlled area, is either nil or a very few, even though, in these districts, they remain the major ethnic groups.

Table No. 7.1

Ethnic Composition in District Organizations of the Political Parties

District/Party	High Castes	Magar	Other	Other Caste	Total
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	Hill group		Janajatis	group	
Kaski-NC	36	-	9	2	47
Kaski-UML	27	-	8	2	37
Kaski-Maoist	11	3	6	7	27
Kaski-Rastriya Janamorcha (M)	9	2		1	12
Kaski-JanMorcha (E)	5	-	2	2	9
Kaski-RPP	17	1	10	-	28
Total Number (Kaski)	105	6	35	14	160
	65.6%	3.7%	21.9%	8.7%	100.0%
Percent of total Population	47.1	6.2	30.2	16.5	380527
Myagdi-NC	22	5	10	2	39
Myagdi-UML	15	4	2	-	21
Myagdi -Maoist	6	7	-	4	17
Myagdi-Rastriya Janmorcha (M)	6	5	1	1	13
Myagdi-RPP	7	3	4	1	15
Total Number (Myagdi)	56	24	17	8	105
	53.3%	22.8%	16.2	7.6%	100.0%
Percent of total Population	26.6	41.8	8.3	23.3	114447
Palpa-Nepali Congress	34	7	5	2	48
Palpa – UML	20	4	1	1	26
Palpa – Maoist	9	5	1	4	19
Palpa-Rastriya Janamorcha (M)	6	7	-	-	13
Palpa – RPP	16	4	9	-	29
Total Number (Palpa)	85	27	16	7	135
	63.0%	20.0%	11.8%	5.2%	100.0%
Percent of total Population	29.1	50.9	7.7	12.3	268558

Source: Field Study, 2006.

According to table no. 7.1, in Kaski district, the high caste hill group, including Brahmin and Chhetri, has 47.1 percent of the population, but 65.6 percent of representation in political parties, followed by 22 percent by other janajatis and 8.7 percent by other groups, including Dalits. Whereas, Magars, who possess 6.2 percent of the population, have only 3.7 percent of the representation. Hence, besides the Maoist, there is no any representation in other Major parties like NC and UML. Likewise, in the Myagdi and Palpa districts, where Magar is in the majority with 41.8 and 50.9 percent of the population, their representation in various

political parties is only 22.8 and 20 percent respectively. Although, these representations are very low regarding their strength of the population, as the dominant group they have inclusive participation in all most all political parties in Myagdi and Palpa. But, no Magar has obtained any major post, such as chairman or president, in any district committee of the political parties in these three districts. Among the major political parties, the Maoist party seems more inclusive in terms of the composition of its district level committee in three districts. Although, there has not been any Magar representation in the NC and UML of Kaski district, both parties had put forward two Magar candidates (one for FPTP system from NC side and next for PR list from the UML side) in the CA election. Among the candidates in Palpa, Magars succeeded in gaining two out of three CA seats in the district by FPTP. While in Myagdi- a Magar dominated district- the Magar candidate was defeated by the Brahmin candidate contested from the Maoist party⁷⁸.

During the field study the researcher asked number of Magar activists as why they, despite being the major ethnic group, have only a very low level of representation in party politics and its leadership. The senior activists replied that Magars are straight-forward and they can not abide by political machinations and strategies. Therefore, they have been exploited by the political parties as they remain followers and voters instead of establishing their own leadership⁷⁹. On the other side, many activists said that the Magars are highly interested in joining the British and Indian armies and also like to do civil work in foreign in order to seek good income and more comfortable life. As a result, they are not interested in politics as well as in getting jobs in Nepalese organizations. They further stated that Magars have been socialised by such trends since their early life⁸⁰. It is found that their society prefers these trends on the one hand and the state can not provide them with any job or other means of employment on the other. For this reason, it can be said that they are not motivated towards politics or further carrier in Nepal. On the other side, it could not be practically said that every political leader at the local level gets a public post or representation in the state affairs in terms of public status and earning. If some are able to get such post or representation, it doesn't mean the source of well earning. Therefore, a senior activist in Pokhara said that 'We Magar have no patience for making longer affiliation with a given

⁷⁸ About Magars and the Maoist politics, see chapter-8.

⁷⁹ An interview with Kesar Jung Baral Magar, an advisor to NMA and NMLF 2063/3/12, Krishna Bahadur Thapa Magar, the chairman of the NMA-Kaski 2063/4/5, 2063/11/1, and Surendra Thapa Magar 2063/10/29.

⁸⁰ These views are representative of many Magar activists like, Lal Bahadur Pun, Ram Bahadur Budha Magar of the Baranja, Pradeep Pun, Mansara Pun and Kumar Pun of Histan- Myagdi, Jhak Bahadur Thapa, Indra Bahadur Garbuja, Karna Pahdaru Rana of Kaski, and Bal Bahadur Gaha, Bal Bahadur Rana, Top Aslami, Kahar sing Rana, Rama Bahadur Rana and others of Palpa district.

party; we have no confidence in political career. Therefore, either we try to affiliate with more than a party at the same time or we become passive in politics'. Some activists in Pokhara and Myagdi, particularly from ex-army background of foreign countries, stated in their interviews that most of the Magars from this background prefer to have good income and ignore the broader social and political life. They are limited to a circle of their relatives and not interested in interacting with others. The activists concluded that most of them are outside their native societies due to foreign jobs and migration in new urban centers. Therefore, these factors do not favour them and they hesitate to get involved in active social and political life in a new society. Even most of the activists said that they like to introduce themselves as social activists rather than politicians.

On the other side, Bom Kumari Budha, a senior activist, said in her interview that without good economy and affiliation to traditional ruling family, it is difficult to be active in politics. Through these means, activists could influence and lead over the general Magar masses. She further stated many examples of different parties and concluded that they have succeeded in politics due to good economy and affiliation with traditional ruling family. The researcher has also found that those Magars from good economy and traditional ruling elite background were active in local politics. On the contrary, those Magars settling in the rural areas and who are fighting for their livelihood are not interested in politics⁸¹. With regards to Magars involvement in party politics, it seems that those who have a good economic background as a result of foreign jobs, migrate to urban centers and, due to their long stay out-side the country, are not interested in party politics, and those who are not financially secure, struggle for survival at the grass-roots level.

On the other side, almost all Magar activists accepted that those who are from the traditional ruling class are naturally endowed with political leadership characteristics and are actively involved in party politics. The researcher has found through interviews with some political leaders who have participated actively in local politics that they were either from traditional ruling families or from secure economic backgrounds, in terms of possessing more productive land. Hence, almost all political parties including the Maoists have been dominated by the elites from high caste hill group. A few Magar activists who are from a poor economic background are also actively participating in local politics but they are not in leadership position. In this regard, some Magars are active in the Maoist party and its ethnic wing called the Magar National Liberation Front. It is time to see how far such activists will go in upgrading and obtaining their post that befits their political contribution

⁸¹ Through the small informal meeting including around 10 people in the Dhanaharka of the Somadi VDC of the Palpa district, they declared that lacking property and employment, they had difficulty to survive. They are able to feed their family for only three months with their own production, and for the remaining nine months they move to other places to find jobs for skilled and unskilled labourers in order to survive (2063/6/20).

to the party or it is just the political parties using their sentiments to obtain power through their support.

Magars in rural villages were influenced by party politics. In urban centers people belong to the parties other than the Maoist, whereas, in many rural villages Magars became members of the Maoist party due to either its popularity or threats of its activists. In this context, some have been found to have double membership. In response to researcher's query, a local Magar activist in the rural village of Myagdi said that he was a member of the UML but now he has become a member of the Maoist party without resigning from the former. He became a Maoist for his security. The CA result shows that in Myagdi, Maoist party gained victory in the CA election. In this regard, a Magar activist said that people are either forced to cast their vote or pressured to think that a Maoist victory would relieve them from the physical and psychological threat. Therefore, the Magars in his village cast their votes to the Maoist candidate even though they were not Maoists. They believed that if the Maoists won the election they would run the government and they would have state power and resources, and would not threaten the people. A 50-year-old man who has recently migrated to Pokhara from Myagdi told the researcher that he used to cast his vote for the UML's candidate most of the time, but in the latest CA election he voted for the Maoist candidate. It was because, he had no option to cast vote against the Maoist. Along with other people in his village, he also thought that there would be peace and development if the Maoists hold the power and run the formal government.

The researcher had conducted his field work immediately after the success of the *Janandolan II* and comprehensive peace agreement. It was conducted after the two year long protest against the King's rule and a decade long Maoist conflict. Hence, the environment was still tense in the rural areas. Due to the threat from both sides, the government and the Maoist, people were unwilling to express their affiliation or dissatisfaction with the Maoist party. In his first trip in Baranja village, where there was a high tension during the conflict, the researcher experienced that the people did not want to talk to him. It was because they could not feel secure articulating their views. On the contrary, the researcher found that the people in Histan village of Myagdi were more open and felt easy to talk over any political issues as no incident had happened there during the Maoist conflict. Therefore, they openly stated that they were members of the Maoist party and stated their post in its village-level organisation. The researcher was surprised when he asked some queries to the head-master who was working in one of the hamlets of Histan village. He said that he was a member of the UML but was going to cast his vote for the Maoist candidate. He believed that the Maoist party could do better for the nation and in his local area rather than other parties. In Somadi of Palpa district, the researcher talked to five young Magars about many issues and asked them which party they favoured. They

didn't like to say their affiliation with any party due to their suspicion that the researcher was a government spy. When he revealed himself to be an academic researcher and gave his word that whatever they stated through their interviews would be kept secret and used only for research purposes, then all five at last said that they all were members of the Maoist party in their village. They said, 'Maoist is the only party for the development of the state and welfare of the people'. They thought that the Maoist could do better for the Magar people rather than UML and NC. On the other side, in some other villages in the study areas the researcher did not find Maoist influence effective on the people for two reasons: first, people had negative images of the Maoist war; and second, other political parties like UML and NC rather than Maoist party still held strongly in those parts.

However, on the eve of the CA election, the Maoist party in support of its various sister and professional organisations rapidly started their activities mobilising different sectors of the people for strengthening and seeking their support to the party. There were pro-Maoist demonstrations from time to time in Pokhara initiated by newly formed organisation of hotel workers, landless people, small traders and ethnic people. A few days before the CA election, the political situation was largely favourable to the Maoists, because commoners and activists at the grass-roots level wanted to see this party in power. They hoped that there would be peace and development as well as state will receive a better constitution, if the Maoist were victorious. Therefore, they voted for the Maoists irrespective of their previously held ideologies. Some of them did this as a means to vent their dissatisfaction against the existing parliamentary parties. Some activists in one of the Magar villages in eastern Palpa district said that although they belonged to the UML and PLP (People Liberation Party-Janmukti), they would like to see the Maoist in government for peace and democracy. The researcher found similar sentiment among the people in the Aulo and Rima villages of Histan VDC of Myagdi because they were influenced by the Maoist party and its ethnic front organisation, MNLF. Therefore, they had decided to cast their vote in favour of the Maoist party. On the other hand, during his field work the researcher had found that most of the villagers in some Magar villages of Myagdi and Palpa were still frightened, therefore, they either did not speak and articulated their views strategically or hesitated to share their views on political ideology and party politics.

7.3 Magars' Attachment with the Political Party

Although Magars feel that the political parties and their leaders do not have a positive image due to their past performances, they do not deny that they are the means to rule and govern the country. Political parties are the bridges between the people and the government, and between society and the state. Therefore, the majority of the Magars at the local level are either actively involved in party politics or at least strongly support the

political parties, rather than their own ethnic organizations, which are more limited to district headquarters.

According to the activists, it is difficult to manage the party identity and ethnic identity at the same time. Therefore, as Magars, some activists like to give their priority to the ethnic / Magar organisation, whereas some other devotes much to the party politics rather than their ethnic identity. The senior woman Magar activist, Syam Maya Pun, said that she preferred to adhere to the Magar organisation than to a political party. She was the chairman of the NMWA⁸². Likewise, Krishna Bahadur Thapa Magar was gaining popularity among the Magars and ethnic activists because of his good performance in NMA-Kaski. He never imposed his political inclinations in Magar activism though he has been connected with NC for a long time⁸³. He further said that he preferred working with Magar issues rather than promoting party interests by sharing the difficulties experienced by Magars at the grass-root level to mobilise them towards the NMA's ends. On the other hand, some activists are equally concerned about party affiliation and ethnic identity. For instance, Lokendra Bista, Basanta Budha, Suresh Ale, Lok Bahadur Thapa, Dal Bahadur Rana, Jhak Bahadur Thapa, etc. all succeeded in establishing their leadership in political party and ethnic organisation. They are famous among the Magar and ethnic activism as well as political party. For instance, Jhak Bahadur Thapa Magar was a member of the UML's Gandaki Zonal committee and the general secretary to the NMA in its central committee for some time when he became the chairman of the NMA. He was also a PR candidate in the CA election but didn't get the opportunity to represent the CA. His supporters opposed the party and forced him to leave the party for not providing him a representative seat and not considering the NMA and Magar community at large. However, he continued to work for the NMA as its chairman and as an UML's activist⁸⁴.

⁸² Syam Maya Pun, the chairman of the NMWA said in her interview of 2063/5/3, although she was also involved in party ideology, she liked to work with Magar women through Magar organisations. She thought that she can contribute more through the ethnic organisation rather than through affiliation to a political party, since politics is almost always controversial due to conflicts between and among the various ideologies.

⁸³ An interview with Krishan Bahadur Thapa Magar, the Chairman of the NMA-Kaski, 2063/4/5, 3063/11/1.

⁸⁴ According to Jhak Bahadur Thapa Magar, he was a potential candidate in the PR list in the Gandaki region but lost to get representation in the CA. He thought that he had not much influence on the central committee of the UML though he has been working as an active ethnic activist within and outside the party since along. However, he believed that he can do much to his ethnic group through the NMA and his party may evaluate his contribution in the coming days.

Some Magar activists, however, are more devoted to party politics than to Magar ethnic identity. A NC activist in Palpa said that Magar liberation could only be realized through the NC as a Democratic Party. He believed that the NC favours the upliftment and empowerment of the Magar people⁸⁵. Suresh Ale and Lok Bahadur Thapa Magar, both think that there should be a link between party and ethnicity and that is the Maoist policy which has been carried out since the Peoples' War⁸⁶. According to them, the Maoist party, particularly Prachanda's ideology, is the only way to fuse politics and ethnicity. They believed that it is the only way to get the Magarant federal province and Magars could be liberated from century-long exploitation and deprivation. Both favour party affiliation along with ethnic line. They further said that if the Magars did not get their rights in their historical Magarant territory with autonomous rule and ownership of governance and resources in a given region, then they would revolt for securing this sovereign power. It seems that Magars have been encouraged by the political parties and are significantly involved in party politics. The description of Magar involvement in the party politics is given below:

⁸⁵ An interview with Bir Bahadur Rana, a district member of the Nepali Congress, Palpa, 2063/7/17.

⁸⁶ Interview with Suresh Ale in 2063/9/12 and with Lok Bahadur Thapa Magar in 2063/7/20. Both share the view that the Maoists and Prachanda Path are the only way to secure the liberation of the Magars and a Magarant state.

Table No. 7.2**Do you Affiliate with Political Party and sister organisation?**

Affiliation/Background	Voters			Activists			Grand Total		
	Yes	No	Total	Yes	No	Total	Yes	No	Total
Political Party	131 43.7%	169 56.3%	300 100.0%	75 100%	-	75 100.0%	206 54.9%	169 45.1%	375 100%
Sister Organisation	16 12.2%	115 87.8%	131 100.0%	25 33.3%	50 66.7%	75 100.0%	41 19.9%	165 80.1%	206 100%

Source: Field Survey 2006.

As per table no. 7.2, around 55 percent of Magars are either actively involved in or are strong supporters of the political party. Almost all activists are affiliated with the political parties according to their own choice, whereas only around 44 percent of voters are involved as members or strong supporters against the 56 percent that seem neutral or not strongly attached to any party. In relation to commoners, activists are found politically more aware because of their education, economic status and family legacy. They follow different ideologies of political parties according to their own background and process of party socialisation. According to table 7.2, party affiliation of voters is found to be low. Over 56 percent, majority of the voters are not affiliated with any political party. In contrast to party politics, Magars involvement in sister organisations is found to be significantly less. Only 12 percent of the voters and 33 percent of the activists, those who are party members, are also affiliated with its sister organisations. There are some reasons behind the decreasing role of sister organisations. First, sister organisations were more active when the parties were banned before the 1990's era, but after the restoration of democracy with political liberties, parties are more active and they extend political activities to the people. Second, it seems that most of the sister organisations have limited scope and are more active only in urban centers rather than in rural areas. Third, it was common to join sister organisations when it was too difficult to get party membership, but now anyone, at any moment can become a member of any political party. Therefore, many people are affiliated with political parties rather than with their sister organisations. Following table records in detail the Magar affiliation with party ideology in various categories.

Table No. 7.3

**Are you the member/Supporter of any
Political Party or their Sister Organisation?**

		Voters						Activists			
		Political Party			Sister Organization			Political Party	Sister Organization		
		Yes	No	Total	Yes	No	Total	Yes	Yes	No	Total
Place	Rural	111	124	235	5	106	111	31	9	22	31
		47.2%	52.8%	100.0%	4.5%	95.5%	100.0%	100.0%	29.0%	71.0%	100.0%
	Urban	20	45	65	11	9	20	44	16	28	44
		30.8%	69.2%	100.0%	55.0%	45.0%	100.0%	100.0%	36.4%	63.6%	100.0%
Age group	18-30	29	44	73	9	20	29	8	6	2	8
		39.7%	60.3%	100.0%	31.0%	69.0%	100.0%	100.0%	75.9%	25.0%	100.0%
	31-45	48	49	97	4	44	48	32	11	21	32
		49.5%	50.5%	100.0%	8.3%	91.7%	100.0%	100.0%	34.4%	65.6%	100.0%
	46-60	36	43	79	2	34	36	22	7	15	22
		45.6%	54.4%	100.0%	5.6%	94.4%	100.0%	100.0%	31.8%	68.2%	100.0%
	Above 60	18	33	51	1	17	18	13	1	12	13
		35.3%	64.7%	100.0%	5.6%	94.4%	100.0%	100.0%	7.7%	92.3%	100.0%
Level of Education	Illiterate	20	49	69	1	19	20				
		29.0%	71.0%	100.0%	5.0%	95.0%	100.0%				
	Literate	46	58	104	1	49	50	25	8	17	25
		44.2%	55.8%	100.0%	2.0%	98.0%	100.0%	100.0%	32.0%	68.0%	100.0%
	School	42	46	88	8	34	42	24	7	17	24
		47.7%	52.3%	100.0%	19.0%	81.0%	100.0%	100.0%	29.2%	70.8%	100.0%
	Inter	14	11	25	4	10	14	6		6	6
		56.0%	44.0%	100.0%	28.6%	71.4%	100.0%	100.0%		100.0%	100.0%
	Bachelor	8	4	12	1	3	4	18	8	10	18
		66.7%	33.3%	100.0%	25.0%	75.0%	100.0%	100.0%	44.4%	55.6%	100.0%
	Master	1	1	2	1		1	2	2		2

	and above	50.0%	50.0%	100.0%	100.0		100.0%	100.0%	100%		100.0%
Gender	Male	75 52.8%	67 47.2%	142 100.0%	9 12.0%	66 88.0%	75 100.0%	57 100.0%	19 33.3%	38 66.7%	57 100.0%
	Female	56 35.4%	102 64.6%	158 100.0%	7 12.5%	49 87.5%	56 100.0%	18 100.0%	6 33.3%	12 66.7%	18 100.0%
District	Kaski	32 32.0%	68 68.0%	100 100.0%	3 9.4%	29 90.6%	32 100.0%	25 100.0%	4 16.0%	21 84.0%	25 100.0%
	Myagdi	58 58.0%	42 42.0%	100 100.0%	5 8.6%	53 91.4%	58 100.0%	25 100.0%	11 44.0%	14 56.0%	25 100.0%
	Palpa	41 41.0%	59 59.0%	100 100.0%	8 19.5%	33 80.5%	41 100.0%	25 100.0%	10 40.0%	15 60.0%	25 100.0%
Possession of land area	< 10 Rop.:	46	78	124	10	36	46	10	4	6	10
	Rural	37.1%	62.9%	100.0%	21.7%	78.3%	100.0%	100.0%	40.0%	60.0%	100.0%
	11-40 Rop.	62	44	106	5	57	62	22	7	15	22
	Rural	58.5%	41.5%	100.0%	8.1%	91.9%	100.0%	100.0%	31.8%	68.2%	100.0%
	>40Ropani:	3	2	5		3	3	2		2	2
	Rural	60.0%	40.0%	100.0%		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		100.0%	100.0%
	< 1 Ropani:	9	24	33	1	8	9	13	5	8	13
	Urban	27.3%	72.7%	100.0%	11.1%	88.9%	100.0%	100.0%	38.5%	61.5%	100.0%
	1-5 Ropani:	11	17	28		11	11	22	7	15	22
	Urban	39.3%	60.7%	100.0%		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	31.8%	68.2%	100.0%
	>5 Ropani:		4	4				6	2	4	6
	Urban		100.0%	100.0%				100.0%	33.3%	66.7%	100.0%
Total		131 43.7%	169 3%	300 100.0%	16 12.2%	115 87.8%	131 0%	75 100.0%	25 33.3%	50 66.7%	75 100.0%

Source: Field Survey, 2006.

As per table no. 7.3, the young age group, male people and who have well economic and education background are more closely affiliated with political parties rather than older age groups, women and those who have less education and low economic backgrounds. From this, it is found that party affiliation is more related to higher level of education and the

larger area of property owned. It is interesting to note that Magars of rural areas are more affiliated with political parties than that of the urban areas. Similarly, table 7-3 also shows that Magars of Myagdi and Palpa have close identity with a distinct political ideology than those of Kaski district and its centre, Pokhara. This is because Pokhara city and the areas nearby are the migrated home of many ex-British army men who have a handsome income earned from the foreign countries. In addition to this, they own a lot of property in the city but they are not interested in party politics. In relation to other caste and ethnic groups like some Brahmin and Chhetri who have been indigenously settled from time unknown, such ex-army group, particularly Gurung and Magars, are the recent migrants and are less successful in politics. Some Magar activists argued with the researcher that almost all such group of people have no interest in politics because they spent comfortable life in foreign countries and their nature of job could not encourage them to socialise in political arena. Besides these, they are an ethnic minority since they left their own dominant society, therefore, they are in contact with Magar organisations and then they are mobilised towards ethnic identity rather than in political parties or sister organizations (see table 5.6 in previous chapter V).

On the other hand, in the Magar-dominant rural parts of Myagdi and Palpa, the political parties are very active rather than Magar ethnic organisations. Political parties organize various functions and programmes. Therefore, they are able to mobilize people towards the party's ideological orientation. Hence, local leaders of the political parties in Myagdi and Palpa, particularly the UML and the Maoist cadres, visit different villages time to time in order to mobilise the local people as per their party ideology. Researcher has found such activities conducted by political parties during his field work in these districts. But he did not encounter such activities in Kaski. Therefore, compared to Kaski and its urban hub-Pokhara, the Magars of Myagdi and Palpa are more influenced by party politics, particularly left ideology. However, it is interesting to note that generally it is believed that people from the urban sector are more aware and educated; therefore they would participate enthusiastically in politics and political activities. But table 7.3 shows that people from rural areas are involved more in party politics than those who live in the urban areas. It seems that people from villages do not have enough information to compare the parties and their principles, because they don't have any good means of communication for delivering their political values. Therefore, they simply become party members or supporters on the request of local leaders, who naturally may be relatives or popular among the people.

However, property and education appear to be the key factors in promoting active politics. Table no. 7.3 also reveals that the activists who hold these things seem to be more active in politics and political parties. If we go through the data for each district then we can see that Magars of Myagdi are more attached to politics, followed by those of Kaski and Palpa. In

comparison to their involvement in party politics, the Magars' participation in sister organisations is less and intense. It is because, according to the NMA's chairman, these organisations used to be more active when the parties were underground and political liberties were banned by the undemocratic Panchayat government. Therefore, there was a trend to be affiliated with sister organisations which were regarded as the professional pressure groups, instead of political parties. Since the restoration of democracy in 1990, parties have been found to be more active in bridging the gap between the state and the people. It has been found that people are more politicised and some of them have received the membership of political parties. The scope of sister organizations, meanwhile, is almost entirely limited to the urban centers, and same person is often involved in two or more sister organisations of a political party.

7.4 Favourable (Popular) Political Party

In the post-1990 period, Magars at the grass-roots level evaluated the political parties from their performances and activities. The political mobilisations along with the policies and programmes of the political parties determine the attitudes and attachment of the people towards party politics. Hence, people at the local level developed their beliefs towards political parties through actions and reactions rather than as a result of ideological orientations. Likewise, relatives and friends had also an influential role in projecting a favourable and unfavourable party image of the party. Therefore, if people were dissatisfied with an existing party with which they were affiliated, they simply would change their affiliation. The chairman of the Janamukti party in Myagdi said that he joined this party when he left the UML. He further stated that he was dissatisfied with the UML due to its lack of clear policy or activities for empowering the *Janajatis* (Magars)⁸⁷. Hence, he said, 'the Janamukti is a nice party, and it has formulated policy to make all *janajatis* sovereign along with keeping the social harmony and dignity of each group of the population. For instance, Magars will have control in the region where they are in a majority through proportional representation. He accepted that his party could not succeed in mobilising ethnic people like the Magars in Myagdi towards its ideology due to the absence of organisations at the grass-roots level. Those ethnic activists who were members of the District Committee have gone abroad for employment. Likewise, an activist of the Bhagani village of the Somadi VDC (Palpa) said that he first became active some years ago in the UML, then joined the NC, and now is a Maoist local leader. Responding to why he became a Maoist leaving the NC, he said that he was dissatisfied with the activities of the NC for most of the time it was in power after the 1990 movement, and its failure to lead the nation and help the poor and people of

⁸⁷ Nar Bahadur Thapa Magar, the chairman of the Janamukti (People liberation) party interview in 2063/5/5

ethnicity. Besides these factors, he also became affiliated with the Maoists due to the wishes of his daughter who belonged to the Maoist militia⁸⁸.

During his stay in Pipaldanda VDC, one day the researcher encountered a small gathering of young men in lower Rimigha, which is effectively dominated by the Magar population. While talking about political issues, they expressed their view that the Maoist party seemed more rational in order to achieve Magar empowerment. They stated that Magars (as like them) from the Kham region have greatly contributed to the Maoist party. A local Magar leader who worked in INGO strongly influenced them when he joined the Maoist party after leaving the Janamukti. As a result of shared ethnicity they became supporters of the Maoists irrespective of the fact that they were previously members of the Janamukti party. In their view, the Janamukti party will never be popular among the ethnic and Magar people due to the personal vested interests of its central leadership. They also judged that this party along with NC and UML has no clear policy for empowering the Magars and other ethnic people.

On the other side, some people expressed that they are satisfied with their affiliated political party. For example, Mukta Bahadur Sonari Magar and Sher Bahadur Somai of the Pipaldanda and Somadi respectively said in their interviews that they had no complaints against the NC to which they had been affiliated with since the restoration of democracy in 1990 and were not swayed by those young generations in his locality, who supported the Left and requested them from time to time to get involved in their party⁸⁹. When the researcher talked with some young activists in those hamlets, they put forward their view that 'he is a respected person by dint of his seniority, popularity, wisdom, and more so than the representative of their own party at the village who often drink and behave roughly'. Likewise, the researcher had met an activist in the upper Rimigha - Pipal danda of the Palpa, who was defeated in the local election but still strongly supported the UML, believing that 'only the UML is the best choice for the nation and the Magars'⁹⁰. Therefore, he mentioned that most of his relatives supported this party. During the field study in Aulo village of the Histan VDC, Myagdi, a local activist told the researcher that he was offered the position of local leader by the Maoist party and he had been working in the post since a few months ago. He further stated, 'my relatives and villagers who previously favoured the UML, NC and RPP, are also now working for the Maoist party.' Moreover, in local ward of his hometown – Pokhara, the researcher found a man who used to be the local NC leader of his rural village now worked as the chief of the Maoist party at the ward committee now.

⁸⁸ An interview with a 50 year old activist of the Bhagani, Somadi village of the Palpa district, 2063/6/20.

⁸⁹ Interview in 2063/6/22.

⁹⁰ An interview with Tak Bahadur Somai Magar in 2063/6/22.

It suppose naturally in open multiparty democracy that people at the local level swap their allegiances (cross from leftist to leftist, centrists to leftists and rightist to leftists) since there are no strict rules to punish individuals for crossing the party affiliation and parties are guided by power calculations rather than ideological background. Hence, it seemed that during the CA election, as the emerging party the Maoists opened its door for all ex-Panchas in order to win the election and to be a major party⁹¹. Furthermore, the surrounding ecology also plays a decisive role in determining whether an individual decides to become affiliated with a particular political party or not. However, the general trend in Nepali politics seems ‘the power centered politics’, through which the neutral mass and the opportunist activists almost all are in favour of the ruling party or the group who holds the power and resources of the state. One can find the best example of local elections that were held in 1992 and 1997 where NC and UML were favoured respectively since the parties were in power at that time. In contemporary politics, such a trend has effectively favoured the Maoist party either due to their ruling position in power and resources or due to influences of their military and paramilitary forces.

The formal official data, particularly the results of the CA election, show that relative to centrist and rightist political parties, the leftist political parties have more influence in the west hill (Magarant) region⁹². The election results in the region are overwhelmingly in favour of the Maoist party, though the party affiliation results showed differently while the survey was conducted 18 months before the CA election. The original information as mentioned here was collected from primary sources, particularly by individual survey and face to face personal interview, research tools that best depict popular opinion and give an up to date picture of how things stand. Therefore, this tendency, along with the analysis mentioned above, means that the party attachment and casting vote may some times differ. However, the following table presents the popular political party among the Magars.

Table No. 7.4

Which Political Party do you favour?

	NC	UML	Maoist	P F	P L	RPP	Samata	Total
Activists-Kaski	6	12	3		2		2	25
	24.0%	48.0%	12.0%		8.0%		8.0%	100.0%

⁹¹ Some former rightist politicians cum bureaucrats such as Panchas and the King’s men are now associated with the Maoist party either as CA members or as advisors to the Maoists’ rule (see Kantipur 2064/8....).

⁹² For the Rightist, Centrists and Leftists concept of the political party see, Hans Eysenck (1964), Heywood (2000: 252-256) and for Nepali context see, Hachhethu (2002).

lumle		3 75.0%	1 25.0%					4 100.0%
nirmal pokhari	2 66.7%	1 33.3%						3 100.0%
pokhara	4 22.2%	8 44.4%	2 11.1%		2 11.1%		2 11.1%	18 100.0%
Activists-Myagdi	3 12.0%	11 44.0%	6 24.0%	1 4.0%	1 4.0%	2 8.0%	1 4.0%	25 100.0%
baranja	1 20.0%	2 40.0%	2 40.0%					5 100.0%
beni bazar	1 9.1	4 36.3%	1 9.1%	1 9.1%	1 9.1%	2 18.2%	1 9.1%	11 100.0%
histan	1 11.1%	5 55.6%	3 33.3%					9 100.0%
Activists-Palpa	9 36.0%	8 32.0%	5 20.0%	1 4.0%	2 8.0%			25 100.0%
pipladanda	3 50.0%	2 33.3%	1 16.7%					6 100.0%
somadi	1 25.0%	2 50.0%	1 25.0%					4 100.0%
tansen	5 33.3%	4 26.7%	3 20.0%	1 6.7%	2 13.3%			15 100.0%
Total-Activists	18 24.0%	31 41.3%	14 18.7%	2 2.7%	5 6.7%	2 2.7%	3 4.0%	75 100.0%
Voters-Kaski	9 28.1%	14 43.8%	5 15.6%			4 12.5%		32 100.0%
lumle	2 22.2%	4 44.4%	1 11.1%			2 22.2%		9 100.0%
nirmal pokhari	3 30.0%	4 40.0%	2 20.0%			1 10.0%		10 100.0%
pokhara	4	6	2			1		13

	30.8%	46.1%	15.4%			7.7%		100.0%
Voters-Myagdi	7	26	17			8		58
	12.1%	44.8%	29.3%			13.8%		100.0%
baranja	2	10	8			6		26
	7.7%	38.5%	30.7%			23.1%		100.0%
beni bazar	1	3	1					5
	20.0%	60.0%	20.0%					100.0%
histan	4	13	8			2		27
	14.8%	48.1%	29.6%			7.4%		100.0%
Voters-Palpa	8	18	9		6			41
	19.5%	43.9%	21.9%		14.6%			100.0%
pipladanda	7	13	5		5			30
	23.3%	43.3%	16.7%		16.7%			100.0%
somadi	1	4	4					9
	11.1%	44.4%	44.4%					100.0%
tansen		1			1			2
		50.0%			50.0%			100.0%
Total-Voters	24	58	31		6	12		131
	18.3%	44.3%	23.7%		4.6%	9.1%		100.0%
Grand Total	42	96	45	2	11	14	3	206
	20.4%	43.2%	21.8%	1.0%	5.3%	6.8%	1.5%	100.0%

Source: Field Survey, 2006.

As per table no. 7.4, 43.2 Magars support the UML followed by 21.8 percent support for the Maoists, while the NC, the centrist party, has 20.4 percent. RPP as the rightist and the People Liberation (Janamukti) as the ethnic party have only 6.8 and 5.3 percent attachments respectively, whereas no voter has stated that he/she favours either Samata or People's Front in the given field areas. It seems that people from some villages where the Maoist influence was disseminated during the conflict, are increasingly active in supporting the Maoist party, whereas in the urban sectors most people are considered to be the supporter of the parliamentary parties, particularly UML and NC rather than the Maoist. The numbers affiliated with the UML are high, since its members or supporters were found in every Magar village in the field study areas (see Appendix: 7). Even in NC dominated villages, some UML supporters could be found. Likewise, those villages where the parties like RPP and

People's Liberation were popular some people supported the UML. There were, nevertheless, some villages still dominated by the UML. So far the Maoist party is concerned, it seemed that since the time of the emergence of conflict in their areas, most of the local activists of the ML (splintered from UML) and People's Front had gradually merged into the Maoist Party. According to some senior activists, this has been increasingly the case, particularly since the *Janandolan-II*.

If we look at the cross tabulations in table no. 8.4 for political parties within districts, it appears that NC is relatively strong in Palpa and Kaski but has only slight influence in Myagdi. UML, meanwhile, is equally influential in Myagdi, Kaski and Palpa, The Maoists are strong in Myagdi followed by Palpa, but have less influence in Kaski. Although the trend of which party is popular is not the sole cause for determining and forecasting the election results, the survey that was conducted around two years earlier, nevertheless more or less resembles the CA election results in terms of who won or came close to winning⁹³. Among the constituencies where the surveys were conducted, a post in Kaski along with two seats out of three in the Palpa district went to the UML. Along with one seat in Palpa, the Maoist party also won in Myagdi district where the survey showed that it was relatively strong.

7.5 Levels of Participation in Party Politics

People's political tendencies can be divided into different levels, which Robert Dahl (1995) defines, as non-political strata, political strata, power seeker and powerful. Almost all these considerations are performed through the political parties and their activities. There are large number of people at the grass-root level who may have little or no idea about politics and political parties. The second strata of people, meanwhile, have knowledge and may be affiliated with politics and political parties, but are not actively involved. Finally, some are professionals and are actively involved in day to day party politics, among whom some are power seekers and some are power holders. In proportion to the rest of the population and the ethnic composition in political parties, Magars participation in party politics is found low. Naturally, the activists, rather than the general voters, are more affiliated with and are actively participating in politics through the political parties. Activists, by their nature as members of the political strata in terms of power seekers and the powerful, are actively involved in party politics to one extent or another. However, among the political strata, only some actively participate in the day to day activity of the political party, whereas majority of them only occasionally participate in such activities. The following table presents the level of the Magars' participation in party politics.

⁹³ See in detail, CA election result, www.caelectionresult.com.np or electioncommission.com.np.

Table No. 7.5

How often do you participate in the political party's activities and programmes?

Participate	Voters			Activists			Grand Total
	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	
Regular	2 1.8%	1 5.0%	3 2.3%	6 19.4%	19 43.2%	25 33.3%	28 13.6%
Sometimes	75 67.6%	11 55.0%	86 65.6%	25 80.6%	25 56.8%	50 66.7%	136 66.0%
Not participate	34 30.6%	8 40.0%	42 32.1%	-	-	-	42 20.4%
Total Party Affiliation	111 100.0% 47.2%	20 100.0% 30.8%	131 100.0% 43.7%	31 100.0%	44 100.0%	75 100.0%	206 100.0% 54.9%
Party Non Affiliation	124 52.8%	45 69.2%	169 56.3%	-	-	-	169 45.1%
Grand Total	235 100.0%	65 100.0%	300 100.0%	31 100.0%	44 100.0%	75 100%	375 100.0%

Source: Field Survey, 2006.

The above table no. 7.5 shows that out of 75 activists, 33.3 percent regularly involve in party meeting and its activities, whereas 66.7 percent only participate sometimes. It is interesting to note that those who are regularly involved are from urban areas and those who participate some time in party politics are more from the rural areas. Indeed, many activities of the political parties are conducted in the urban centre and whole timer activists regularly attend such functions. On the contrary, such activities are occasionally organised in the villages, therefore, their members or supporters participate some time. While people may have been guided by different ideologies belonging to political parties and become supporters or members, it is not so easy for rural people like Magars to be involved in day to day activities of party politics. These views significantly represent Magar people in general, as table 8.5 also shows that even party member is very irregular in joining the activities of their affiliated political parties. Likewise, table no. 7.5 also states that large numbers of general people (56 percent) have no political affiliation, whereas, around 44 percent, as either members or strong supporters, are affiliated with party politics. Among the non-activists who are affiliated with political parties, only 2.3 percent are regularly involved in party activities, followed by 65.6 percent sometimes and 32 percent do not participate at all. During the field study, the researcher found that the role of people in politics is determined by the party's activities and its mobilisation at the grass-roots level. It is also the

process of political recruitment when a party is in power, whether it is de jure or de facto, or as a major power seeker, then its activities naturally spring up to successfully mobilise people in its favour. In these situations, not only the activities but also the number of supporters and members increase day by day. On the other hand, during the field study the researcher found that some Magars were not very much interested in party politics, even though they had party membership. Usually this was because, either they had no time to do party work or they became members merely by the influence of friend/relatives. Also, some Magars participated in the Maoist party's activities and programmes simply because no other parties were allowed to do their activities in those areas, which also explains why some Magars do not regularly participate in their party's activities.

It seems that Magars are not deeply involved in the activities and programmes of political parties, as large numbers only participate occasionally. Most party activities are sent out in the urban centre rather than rural areas. Therefore, the percentage of regular participation in the party's activity is higher here than in the country side. Although some are professional politicians and regularly involve in party activities, a large number of people belong to the apolitical strata, therefore are only occasionally involved in politics. Likewise, the non-political stratum is relatively large in number, as table no. 7.5 also shows that 56.3 percent of the general people having no party affiliation or particular political opinion.

7.6 Inspiring Factors to Join a Political Party

Citizens participate in politics as a process of socialisation and orientation towards different political and social values. In due process of political socialisation, various factors latently and manifestly influence the individual's political involvement such as ideology, symbols, human relations and family background. Hence, economic and social statuses play a major role in determining political affiliation. Accordingly, those who have a high economic and social status in terms of the level of education, income, and occupation, participate more in politics (Dahl, 1961; Verba & Nie, 1972; Alford & Friedland, 1975). It can be observed in the Nepalese context, in the case of Magar too, that much of the elites have come from these backgrounds. However, due to political orientations and atmosphere, a few Magar activists have been successful as local political leaders despite their low economic and social status.

Magars at the local level have been surprisingly socialised in party politics. There are many factors in socialising the people in party politics. In this regard, more or less similar attitudes are found among the activists and non-activists in terms of their party attachments. The respondents stated at least two reasons for their attachment to the political ideology that are given in following table.

Table No. 7.6

Why do you like the political party?

	Voters				Activists			
	Kaski	Myagdi	Palpa	Total	Kaski	Myagdi	Palpa	Total
Principle	24 75.0%	43 74.1%	36 87.8%	103 78.6%	18 72.0%	20 80.0%	22 88.0%	60 80.0%
Leaders	12 37.5%	25 43.1%	19 46.3%	56 42.7%	11 44.0%	8 32.0%	7 28.0%	26 34.7%
History	8 25.0%	8 13.8%	9 22.0%	25 19.1%	8 32.0%	2 8.0%	10 40.0%	20 26.7%
Literatures	1 3.1%	2 3.4%	4 9.7%	7 5.3%	3 12.0%	5 20.0%	7 28.0%	15 20.0%
Activities	18 56.2%	44 75.9%	26 53.4%	88 67.2%	12 48.0%	21 84.0%	15 60.0%	48 64.0%
Relatives/ Friends	13 40.6%	27 46.5%	21 51.2%	60 45.8%	8 32.0%	12 48.0%	4 16.0%	24 32.0%
Others	2 6.2%	11 19.0%	5 12.2%	18 13.7%	5 20.0%	6 24.0%	9 36.0%	20 26.7%
Don't know	5 15.6%	3 5.2%		8 6.1%				
Total	32 259.2%	58 281.0%	41 282.6%	131 278.5%	25 260.0%	25 272.0%	25 296.0%	75 284.0%

Percent based on multiple responses.

Source: Field Survey, 2006

As per table no. 7.6, 80 percent activists followed by 78.6 percent non-activists are strongly influenced by the principles of political parties. With reference to party principles, some respondents considered the party's stance on social welfare, poverty reduce and rule of law. Likewise, some others focused on clear policies on the question of empowerment and the inclusion of all *janajatis*, including the Magars, in mainstream politics. Likewise, 64 percent activists and 67.2 percent non-activists are influenced by the activities performed by these parties in the past. 'Activities' are the practical aspects of party policies; as a result people join or rejoin a distinct party and deepen their affiliation with it. Some Magars were still found to be in favour of the UML, because of programs introduced by its government in 1995 in the field of social welfare, particularly elderly allowances and direct economic grants to the local villages. Likewise, some prefer the Maoist party for its revolt against exploitation, suppression and social discrimination as well as its reform activities on bad

social practices. Hence, some activists thought that Magar janajati would be privileged only by the Maoist policy.

It seems that life is relatively simple in villages as compared to urban complexity. Family and personal relations play an important role in socialising people in politics due to the absence of effective means or agents of political socialisation. Therefore, besides the policy and the activities, relatives and friends are major factors in influencing political affiliation. The above table no. 7.6 also reveals that general voters as non-activists are most influenced by friends and relatives (45.8%) followed by leaders (42.7%) as the charismatic symbols of political authority. In contrast, activists are most affected by their leaders (34.6%) followed by the influence of relatives and friends (32%). So far as socialisation through leaders is concerned, most of the activists from UML favoured Madan Bhandari and Man Mohan Adhikari. While the NC activists supported BP Koirala and GP Koirala, and the CPN-Maoists supported comrade Prachanda and Ram Bahadur Thapa Badal. A local activist in Kokal Dhara of the Somadi VDC-Palpa told the researcher that he became member of NC due to the influence of NC leader who represented NC in the government and who did much for his village. Similarly, an ex-soldier from the Indian army said during his interview that he is a member of NC because he had seen the rule of the Congress in India for democratic stability. On the other hand, one ex-army man in the next village told the researcher that when he was young he had heard that if there would be communist rule in the country, private property would be nationalised. In comparison to other villagers, he owned a lot of property, and so he preferred to support the NC. Similar type of views are held by senior activists of Pipaldanda VDC⁹⁴. The settler of this VDC called Keshar Jung Baral Magar told the researcher about the same story of his own family and the village of Kuwadi (Palpa). During the Panchayat system, almost all villagers in Kuwadi supported the communist party due to the influence of a popular local leader who advocated equality and justice for the oppressed and marginalized people. There was also a common belief that the communist ideology meant equal personal property and there would be more property which would be distributed among the poor. Almost all villagers supported the communist ideology; therefore, his own father and brother who owned much property relatively to other villagers, earned from the Indian army service, were affiliated with the NC instead⁹⁵.

A senior activist in Pokhara-Kaski who had migrated from the rural Magar village of Myagdi told a story to the researcher about why he became a worker in the Samata party. He said that the leader, Narayan Singh Pun, was the first Magar man to run the party and was very

⁹⁴ According to Dil Bahadur Baral Magar and Mukta Bahadur Sunari in their interviews in 2063/6/21 and 2063/6/22 respectively.

⁹⁵ Interview with Kasar Jung Baral Magar

active for Magars in Myagdi. Therefore, he said that he liked to work under his leadership⁹⁶. On the other side, a well-known activist in Myagdi said that he was first affiliated with the UML hoping that this party would provide good governance and improve the condition of poor people including Magars in rural villages. But when it came to power, it failed to do so. Therefore he left it and joined the Maoists hoping that this party would do better for the poor and underprivileged people like Magars in the village⁹⁷. A next senior activist of the same village believed that Magars in particular would benefit from the overall transformation of the state, which is only possible by implementing the principles and programmes of the Maoist party⁹⁸. In addition to these examples, through the political history of activists, it can be concluded that the symbols of the party activities and influences of leadership also play key roles in political recruitment.

There are other contributing factors regarding political orientation, such as literature of political ideology and the history of the political party (Gellner and Karki, 2008), but in the case of Magars, these factors do not play a significant role. Compared to regular voters, the number of activists socialised in party politics through history and literature is higher. Literature plays a major significant role for an underground political activity, rather than the open democratic system in which other agents of political socialisation are more influential in determining political affiliation. Furthermore, most of the leftist followers than those of centrist and rightist politics were educated through books, magazines and articles. Some senior activists said that they were very influenced by a colorful Chinese magazine called 'Chin Sachitra', which was available through-out the nation during the 1970s and 80s. Some others were attracted by 'Aama' (Mother by Gorki) whilst others said that they liked the leftist party after having read 'Thank you Mr. Glad' (the history of the Indian Naxalite). Likewise, on the other side, some Magars said that they became more active in the Maoist party after having read Maoist and Prachanda's literatures. Regarding the history, the followers of the NC said their party was a 'historical party' because it had led the three revolutions in the country in favour of open democratic system and human rights. On the other side, followers of the leftists stated their views as they liked their parties viewing the past performances of them and their policy for equality. Generally, it seemed that well educated Magars were influenced by the principles, literature and history of the parties, whereas relatively less-educated Magars of grass roots level were impressed by the practical activities. Finally, relations and leaders also seem to be the inspiring factors for some Magars in determining their attachment to a popular political party.

⁹⁶ Interview with let. Khaka Pun, in 2063/...

⁹⁷ According to Amar Rokka of the Baranja village, Myagdi, 2063/6/23.

⁹⁸ Interview with Gam Bahadur Shreesh, 2063/10/3.

7.7 Policies of Political Parties towards Ethnic Groups

Political parties provide the forum for making public policies in the country. They enable the people in general to decide which policies and ideologies are better to develop the society. The parties' philosophy and policies go some way towards determining people's engagement in party politics. Particularly, people may decide to choose a political party or its candidate looking into their latest election manifestos. They also see their policies on excluded and underprivileged ethnic groups regarding their empowerment in economic, social and political sectors. During the CA election, political parties publish their manifestos in order to appraise the people about their policies including ethnicity and the restructuring of the state. The Nepalese state will be restructured through the new constitution which is going to be drawn up by the Constituent Assembly (CA). The CA as a big house with 601 members was formed through a poll held on 10th April, 2008. In this section, the policies and programmes mentioned by the manifestos of the major parties, particularly NC, UML and the Maoists are discussed.

7.7.1 Nepali Congress's Policy towards the *Adibasis-Janajatis*

On its manifesto for the CA elections, the Nepali Congress (NC) has significantly mentioned janajati issues in various forms. This party primarily emphasises the importance of democracy for national unity, peace and development. Its major policy is federal democratic republic based on pluralism and multiparty system. It is committed to the agreement signed between the state and the Adivasi – Janajatis which is a general guideline for making the constitution through the CA. The NC favours a federal democracy that takes into account questions of national sovereignty, geography, population, natural resources, economic possibilities, interrelation among the provinces, language, ethnic and cultural majority and political and administration possibilities. There will be a guarantee of the specific characteristics of the Madhesi, indigenous nationalities, Dalits and other various groups with their individual characteristics. Likewise, the NC stresses on the importance of equality between languages, ethnicities, cultures and preserving social diversity. All the mother tongues are, therefore, treated equally as national languages. Besides these provisions, there is the special provision on the Adhivasi- Janajati in the chapter on state responsibility, in article 5.3. According to the provision, the primary responsibility of the state will be the national mobilisation of political, economic, social and cultural equity, participation and promotion with the guarantee of inclusive-proportional representation of the Adhivasi- Janajati groups in all organs of the state, as well as of their economic, social, linguistic and cultural rights. Likewise, the state will be responsible to protect and provide social security to the Raute, Munda, Kushawadiya, Yalmo and other endangered and disappearing indigenous groups. Also the state will give high priority to the Rana Tharu, Kathriya Tharu,

Raji communities of the far western region, including Raute, Chepang and other marginalised indigenous groups (NC Manifesto to the CA Election 2008).

7.7.2 CPN UML's Policies towards to *Adibasi-janajatis*

CPN – UML has mentioned in its proposal for consensus in the CA. The major points in this proposal are as follows: End the monarchy and establishment of the republic, participatory and inclusive democracy based on pluralism and economic-social rights, establishment of the federal democratic through the state restructuring, abolishment of social oppression and discrimination on the basis of sex, ethnicity, region, language, religion and others. There are also provisions concerned with the Adibasi-Janajati in its manifesto. It has declared that Nepal is a multiethnic, multilingual, multi-religious, and multicultural country. While making the constitution, this party promises to consider these pluralist features of the Nepalese nation and society. So far in the religious issues, the UML is in favour of the secular state and the religious liberty of all citizens. Likewise, all the native languages will be recognised as national language, among them will be usual languages in central and local level through the multilingual policy. In addition to these points, citizens will have the right to use their mother tongue in the judiciary and government offices. UML will focus on implementing inclusive democracy for communities which are disadvantaged from economic and social point of view. In the process of state restructuring, meanwhile, the inclusive policy will be applied in different organs of the state. There will be implementation of the policy of positive discrimination (reservation) for backward or marginal groups and those seeking economic and social development with their identity. As a result, the concept of '*mero desh-mero rajya*' (My country – My state) will be strengthened among all communities as well as for Nepal.

The UML clearly mentions the topic of Adibasi-Janajati Adhikar (Rights of the Indigenous-Nationalities) in article no. 27 of its manifesto. According to the provision, the Adibasi-Janajatis will have the right to self determination in accordance with the UN declaration of the rights of indigenous people and the ILO Convention-169 in terms of self decision for their own political rights and to develop economically, socially, and culturally. Likewise, the state will be liable for the protection of language, culture and customs of disappearing and marginalised communities. Through 16 various topics and sub-topics, the CPN UML has proposed its plan for the future. Federal structure and governance system are mentioned in chapter 1, according to which, Nepal is a sovereign and indivisible nation-state based on its multiethnic, multilingual and multicultural characters and its geographical diversity. The federal structure will be constituted in accordance with the inherent cultural, ethnic and geographical division. The name of these federal states will be based on their ethnic, linguistic, cultural and historical identity. The local units of the governance will be formed with the policy of self- rule of the local people. UML's manifesto describes its social policy

towards the Adibasi-Janajati such as the development of a proper legal system and structure in order to help for developing the language and culture, to use resources, to determine the political rights and to develop social and economic development (UML's Manifesto for CA Election 2008).

7.7.3 CPN – Maoist's Policy towards *Adibasis-Janajatis*

The CPN-Maoist party in particular has been advocating ethnic autonomy and the right to self-determination for indigenous-nationalities. As with the NC and UML, this party has stated in its manifesto that the content of the new constitution should recognise Nepal as a multiethnic, multilingual, multicultural, multi-religious country with great geographical diversity. Therefore, the state will be restructured in accordance with the ethnic and regional rights of self-decision and self-governance. These features are considered the distinct features of Nepal. In the human rights section of the manifesto, the Maoists have declared that the language, culture and tradition of disappearing and marginalised communities will be protected and there will be necessary support from the state.

Ethnic issues are especially addressed in the chapter on 'Republic and State Restructuring'. The Maoist manifesto argues that politics represents the most effective way to change the world, and Nepal needs a federal structure in order to be developed. Although Nepal is multi-lingual, multi-regional, multi-religious and multi-cultural, most of the ethnic groups including the Magars believe that they have been marginalised and subordinated due to the centralisation of state authority and the domination of Brahmanism. The document claims that the CPN Maoist party is the only party which has been clearly and systematically rising since the beginning of the Peoples War through the linkage of ethnic and regional oppression with class oppression.

The manifesto of the Maoist commitment states that the *Jatiya ra Kshetriya Pahichan* (nationalities and regional identity) is the only scientific and practical possible basis for the federal structure of Nepal. The Maoists have stressed that *Jatiya* doesn't mean ethnicity or race or caste, but rather stable group of people or nationality based on a combination of common language, common geography, common economy and common psychology. The leaders of the Maoist party clarify from time to time that 'Jatiya' denotes as the nationality not ethnicity. For this purpose, the rights to self-decision of oppressed ethnic groups and regions, and optional unity, accordance with their preference are the major concept of federalism. In addition to federalism, there will be three linear divisions, as central, autonomous republic region and local level. The Maoists have clearly proposed that Nepal will be divided into eleven autonomous republic states and other sub-autonomous state or units on the grounds of ethnic construction, geographical situation, language, economic possibility, etc. The Seti-Mahakali and Bheri-Karnali states are proposed on a regional basis,

whereas Magarant, Tharuwan, Tamuwan, Newa, Tamsaling, Kirant, Limbuwan, Kochila and Madhes will be organised on the basis of ethnicity (*Jatiyata*). Within the Madhesh states there will be Mithila, Bhojapura and Awadh as the sub-states. A detailed picture of the federal structure of the Nepalese state was also given in the CPN-Maoist's manifesto for the CA election though it has been revised with adding some ethnic provinces while discussing this agenda in the CA committee for state restructuring (Document of the Commitments, the CPN-Maoist for the Election of Constituent Assembly 2008).

7.7.4 Parties' Manifestos and Ethnicity (Magars)

Most of the people, whether activist or commoner, had a clear idea about the party manifestos in the sense of actual policies and programs to be implemented by the party if its candidates win the election. Through observations made during the CA election, the researcher found that the parties had given more priority to mass demonstrations, corner meetings and door-to-door campaigns rather than making any policy level discussion based on their election manifestos. There was no public debate about the issues mentioned in the manifestos. Indeed, only a limited number of manifestos were printed and these were mainly distributed among leaders at the district and central level, and not extensively disseminated at the grass-root level. During the CA election, the researcher talked to some voters about their vote. Most of them were preoccupied with distinct political ideology as the regular voter of a party. But this time they got two ballot papers. Interestingly, around fifty percent said that they dropped both of their votes for affiliated party. While fifty percent stated that they cast a vote to their favourable candidate through the FPTPS, but for the second one in PR, they cast their vote to a party of their choice. Besides this, as regular observer of the elections, the researcher found that kinship, personal relations and effective personality are the factors which determine the voters' final decision.

So far as election manifestos are concerned, nobody told the researcher that they received the election manifesto or had gone through it. It was limited only to few activists, was not available to general voters, who received a pamphlet instead that covered the major policies of their manifestos and autobiography of the candidate and party. Some said that they read the pamphlet, while some others said that they had received it but hadn't read it. To the researcher's query about the limited number of copies of their manifesto to the officials of political parties at the district level, they responded that it was because the limited number of copies were provided by the central organisation of the party. The researcher received their manifestos after visiting the party offices several times. Therefore, adequate copies were not distributed to the voters at the grass-roots level in order to disseminate parties' ideology and policies. However, some shared their view with researcher that they were

much influenced by the Maoist slogans, such as “As you looked to others in the past, now look to the Maoists” (*Arulai Heraun Barambar, Maobadiliai Heraun Ekbar*). It seemed that the Maoists party had a strong campaign in comparison to other parties in order to win the election, because they visited most of the homes and mobilised the youth activists. Hence, they were able to contact people who had been dissatisfied with their own affiliated parties and encouraged them to join and cast their vote in their favour. But no party distributed its manifestos in order to socialise the voters in their side. It seemed that the manifestos were just the show-piece documents and most of the political activists believed that these are not effective means for winning over the voters. However, they published them as a formality and an obligation toward the electoral process.

During the CA election, the researcher observed mass rallies, corner meetings and door-to-door visits as the major means to win peoples’ votes. The parties neither distributed their manifestos nor advertised their policies for resolving the ethnic conflict and for restructuring the state. Each candidate just focused on the argument that ‘his/her party is the only one able to lead the country, make a new constitution, and resolve all problems’. It seemed that the provisions concerning with the ethnic issues in the manifestos produced by the political parties were only aimed to mobilise the ethnic people in general in order to seek their support. They organised and activated the ethnic wings in order to mobilise the people towards their party’s orientations. Hence, every candidate was actively involved in ethnic functions, public programmes and gatherings in order to gain exposure and seek ethnic backing in the election. However, these were the usual practices during the election through which almost all parties used several means of seeking public support for their candidate in the CA election.

The policies of different parties towards ethnic groups are more or less similar. The three major parties, viz. NC, UML, and the Maoists all want to reconstruct the state as a federal structure and to provide more and more ethnic rights to *Adibasi-Janajati* groups through the CA. Some variations to the form of federal units are to be found in their manifestos. Although some ethnic activists of NC and UML also have been putting forward the proposal of ethnic provinces, these parties favour a federal state in accordance with the variables of language, culture, ethnic population, economy and geographical location while the Maoists suggest eleven autonomous regions in the sense of federalism on the grounds of ethnic nationalities and marginalised geography. It seemed that the Maoist party has a clear vision to divide the state into federal units along with organising political authority by creating a total of eleven such political units. Among them, nine ethnic states would be based on the major ethnic population, Magar, Gurung, Newar, Rai, Limbu, Tharu, Tamang, Kochila and Madhesi. The other two regions will be formed on the grounds of marginal geographical regions, i. e. Bheri-Karnali and Seti-Mahakali which are the most under-developed and rural

parts of Nepal. Hence, they have increased other ethnic provinces, namely, Sherpa and Lama in northern part of Nepal. On the other side, they could not demark the ethnic boarder line due to the disputes emerging among the ethnic organisations and their activists. Hence, once again the Maoist revised their proposal in favour of 14 provinces and most of them are based on ethnicity. Though, it was prepared by the CA committee for state restructuring, Maoist party and its ethnic leaders have the dominant role. When many criticisms were labeled against the publication since it was published, Maoist leaders stated that it is not the last one and could be revised. Therefore, the Maoist's idea of ethnic federalism seems to be inconsistent. It has also proved that making federal provinces based on ethnicity is difficult where nearly hundreds of groups inhabit since time unknown.

However, the Maoists have mentioned the Magarant region which incorporates Magar-dominated settlements in the west hills and which has been in practice by the MNLF since the Maoist war. The ethnic leaders of the NC and UML have also supported some ethnic provinces; among them the one is Magarant. It remains to be seen how far it could be extended among the Magars at the grass-roots level. Hence, how they will be treated, whether it is just a means of taking advantage of Magar sentiment or really a rational approach in order to empower the Magars politically, economically, socially and culturally needs to be examined in greater detail. On the other hand, arranging the other ethnic and caste groups in each ethnic autonomous region and the proposed special rights for only distinct ethnic group seems problematic. The treatment of other groups in majority that would be controlled by the minority ethnic group controlling the province is also a major issue. Besides these, in order to demark a boarder of ethnic provinces, the controversies are seen among the ethnic activists of different parties including the Maoists party as well.

The major political parties, NC and UML, who became the second and third largest parties after the CA election respectively, did not mention their explicit vision on federalism and ethic empowerment in their election manifestos. Hence, it could not find their explanations over the agenda of state restructuring in order to resolve the ethnic conflicts. Without providing any clear picture, these parties put forward their views that the problems of people from marginalised nationalities, territories and ethnic minorities will be solved through the federal units of the state which will be formed by the CA. Likewise, UML has mentioned that ethnic groups, including Magars, will have various ethnic rights such as political, linguistic, religious, cultural and ethnic identity. Hence, it argues that the right to self determination should be provided to each ethnic group in accordance with the ILO Convention-169. On the other side, NC has also put forward its view that the ethnic groups should have the rights to language, cultural and ethnic identity. Recently, there have been open discussions within the party about the agenda of a federal structure. Most of the leaders are of the view that the federal provinces should be based on geographical

boundaries from north to south respectively, whereas, the Maoists have overtly proclaimed that the ethnic federal state will have the right to self-determination and if any federal state wants to separate then it will constitute a separate political entity. This party wants such type of provision to be mentioned in the new constitution in order to ensure good relations between the central and autonomous regions.

However, making federal units, particularly based on ethnic nationalities, seems to be a controversial and debatable issue among the political parties for two main reasons. Firstly, it is not an easy task to define the devolution of power and resources to provinces and local governance, breaking the centuries-long capital-centric, unitary and feudal state. Secondly, in a federalism based on ethnic nationalities, since there are nearly hundred castes and ethnic groups and no one group has the majority in the proposed ethnic based region, then the situation will be inherently difficult to manage. Nevertheless, the forms of the federal states and basic ethnic rights will be mentioned in the new constitution as a result of a consensus among the major political parties and the ethnic leaders in the CA. Undoubtedly, a consensus among the political and ethnic forces to resolve ethnic conflict by providing various ethnic rights in accordance with their identity, will strengthen and sustain democracy. Moreover, the coming days will show to what extent the political parties favour the Magars and other ethnic groups while restructuring and constitution-making process, as outlined in their policies, and whether they are just taking advantage of them by politicising ethnic agendas or are in fact honest in their desire to resolve ethnic conflict by providing more political role with their ethnic identity.

7.8 Conclusion

There has not been long history of party and democratic politics in Nepal. Although multiparty democracy was established in 1950, it was limited to only a few urban areas and ended within a decade. Therefore, people at the grass-roots level have only been acquainted with democratic norms and values since it was reestablished by their instigation in 1990 (janandolan-I). The janandolan-II in April-2006, however, proved that democracy and political parties have become vital to the Nepali people. The afore-mentioned interpretations and analyses show that along with their significant affiliation with political parties and their ideologies, Magars ultimately support multi-party democracy. Political parties and the activists, who promote their ideologies and principles for the welfare of the state and its people, play a decisive role in the mobilisation of people in politics. How people in general perceive the government of a distinct party is also a factor that determines their political choices. In addition to these, political socialisation through education, economy and family backgrounds are also the major factors that influence people in their attitudes towards party ideology and politics. In this regard, relative to the centrist and rightist forces, left parties are in a much better position among the Magars through their careful

management of political perception, which has strategically or rationally succeeded in interconnecting peoples' expectations or grievances and political ideologies. This study also shows that Magar activists are involved in party politics rather than any other Magar ethnic organisations; however, their inclination towards the party politics ultimately helps to flourish different ideologies and values in democracy. On the other side the voters' judgment over the candidacy and the political party is found flexible, as they cast their votes differently to the popular candidate and party. It endeavors to establish the democratic culture using broad and wide knowledge for choosing representations by the civilized citizens irrespective of any rigid and prejudice decision that may harm democracy. Moreover, it is the way to consociational and consolidate democracy. As party members or strong supporters, the Magars' affiliation with political parties seems to create an effective political stratum which strongly links democracy with party politics. Likewise, they oppose the undemocratic actions that have been performed by parties in the past and ultimately favour a positive democratic culture. Most Magars at the grass-roots level believe that political parties are the vanguard of democracy and the chief agents of democratisation and political mobilisation.

CHAPTER VIII

MAGAR ETHNICITY AND CPN (MAOIST)

8.1 The CPN (Maoists) and the People's War

The Communist Party of Nepal (Maoists) [CPN-(M)]⁹⁹ launched its insurgency with the name of "People's War" since February 13th 1996 from the western hills of the Magar dominated-Kham Magarant region. Obviously, the Magar are highly affected by the CPN-Maoist's successful fusion of class war and ethnic uprising. This will be explained, in the following sections, with micro level stories of sampled areas. Before digging the micro level picture, here is a brief narration of the Maoist insurgency at the macro level. It is said that during a decade long Maoist insurgency, around 15000 people were killed, thousands displaced and millions latently and manifestly victimized. The war spread throughout the country, particularly in rural areas. Hence, overtly or covertly, people were much affected by the conflict from both sides, either the Maoist militia or the government forces. Therefore, it was believed that most of the people are well informed about the War. Formal and informal means of communication throughout the War and conflict spread news of violence, destruction or possession of public and private property, explosions, firing, fighting, abandon, and physical torture. The news both in favour of or against the Maoists was disseminated and communicated among the people through personal communication or media during the Maoist conflict. In this context, the political culture of the Magars and their attitudes towards Maoist politics and warfare require further exploration.

Before launching their insurgency, the Maoists submitted 40-point demands to the government through Dr. Babu Ram Bhattarai, the leader of the United People's Front, Nepal (UPFN) on 17th January, 1996. These demands covered three broad sub-groups about nationality, people's democracy, and livelihood¹⁰⁰. The state power and authority was solely controlled by the Nepali Congress most of the time and by the UML for some time following the restoration of multiparty democracy in 1990. These parties at first did not react seriously to those demands, while they were engaged in forming and dismissing the governments for seeking control over the power and resources of the state. As a result, the insurgency began with the desire to implement the Maoist philosophy, but the basis of its expansion was provided by the contextual ecological atmosphere composed of multiple factors. The expression of outrage against age-old grievances resulting from inequalities embedded in

⁹⁹ For, the history of the Communist party of Nepal and the Maoist see, Rose 1969, Hachhethu 2002, Kari and Bhattarai 2003, Nick son 2004, Sharma 2063VS, etc.

¹⁰⁰ About the 40 point demands, see in detail Argon Kari and Binod Bhattarai (eds), *Whose War?* (2004), Annex-10, Page: 176-179.

the Nepali socio-economic structure such as widespread poverty, caste/ethnic/gender-based discrimination, political/social oppression, and corruption were exposed in open democracy and ultimately favoured the Maoists' revolt. Therefore, insurgency did not, in fact, start in 1996 in the form of the Maoists' war; it was seen from time to time in the Panchayat era, preceding the 1990' democracy. However, the grievances and deprivations of the excluded and marginalised sectors of society, including ethnic groups, were catalysed by the Maoists insurgency which extended throughout the country in a decade-long people's war.

The inability of successive governments to address the grievances and increase awareness against the bad governance at the centre, particularly after the restoration of democracy in 1990, resulting from the new debate facilitated to an extent by the free media that added to the frustrations of people on the lower rungs of the socio - economic ladder, and helped the Maoists win them over in their ideological struggle. Many parts of the state, particularly rural sectors are isolated in terms of access to decision making and resources. Neither have the people at the local level been mobilised towards democracy, nor have they been liberated from century-long exploitation, oppression and suppression. There has been no policy to distribute the resources and decision-making power of the centre towards the local people through VDCs in order to decide their own affairs and rule by themselves¹⁰¹. Distributing the economic resources to the villages from central government came into action only when the minority government of CPN UML had emerged as the largest party in the 1994 election. As a result, VDCs became more powerful through the policy of local self-government that was implemented in the 1997's local election. But the people were not mobilized enough to support the traditional liberal democracy, because strong ideological background and catalysed existing grievances of the people at the local level was used by the Maoists to prepare the war for their rule of people's democracy (*Naya Janabadi Babastha*). The parliamentary parties seemed to fail to put forward the strong and stable government in the centre due to the failure of the single party majority government of NC in 1994 and then the collapse of the UML government in 1995. Hence, the parties in the parliament launched an anti-democratic maneuver in order to make and dismiss the central cabinet. Therefore, disorder and rampant corruption emerged in the state mechanism that provoked the formation of a negative political culture and people's dissatisfaction which fertilised Maoist activities. Once again, the NC succeeded to rule the country by the majority as a result of its 1999 general election, but it could not eliminate the corruption, disorder, violence and intra and inter-party conflict. Likewise, policies that were made and operated by the government in order to resolve the Maoist war also failed to manage the conflict which had been equally increasingly extended day by day in rural parts of the country. Along

¹⁰¹ The tradition of cash grants (NRs 10000) from the central to the local government (VDCs) was begun as nominal amount of only NRs. 10,000 in 1992 by the government of Nepali Congress, which was significantly upgraded to NRs. 300, 000 in 1994 by the UML government. It has been raised to NRs. 500, 000 in 1999 and now stands at NRs. 1,000,000.

with these features of the failure of the state, the Royal massacre of King Birendra and the power games played by King Gyanendra in a coup *d'état* also ultimately favoured the Maoist War. Due to the King's direct rule and oppression of democratic parties, the traditional bipolar power centers splintered into three major power centers as the King, the Parliament and the Maoist (Baral 2004). However, the parliamentary political parties and the CPN (Maoist) came into negotiation and a 12 point negotiation that ultimately encouraged the *Janandolan-II* which emerged in the April (2006) movement. Through this, the democratic system prevailed on the one hand, and the Maoists became part of the democratic government through a comprehensive peace agreement which ended the people's war (1996 to 2006).

8.2 Maoist 'People's War' and Magar Ethnicity

The armed insurgency, which is called the People's War, was based in rural parts and settlements in the western hills of Nepal, particularly Magar villages. Maoists settled in Kham Magar dominated areas and tried to establish their base areas there in order to fight with the government. They had some support for their People's War from this community, having assured them that they will establish a political Magarant autonomous region (de Sales 2002). On the other hand, it is also said that "Maoists have cleverly exploited the ethnic issue, by standing up for ethnic rights and holding out the prospect of autonomous regions" (Gellner 2002 : 22). However, the war extensively affected the Magars, therefore, Anne De Sales points out: "there is an irony in the fact that many Magars have been killed and half of the victims have been Magars in the Maoists people's war" (2002 : 341). Indeed, an unofficial publication declares that the total casualties of Magars in the Maoist People's War in 2000 is 24.2 per cent, which is the largest number of any caste and ethnic groups in Nepal (Ekkaisau Satabdi 2000 : 26). In addition, the leader, in-charge of the Gandaki Region of Magar National Liberation Front (MNLF), describes that 'out of twelve thousand casualties during the Maoist peoples' war, around three thousand were Magars (1996-2006). Out of 3000 Magar casualties, around 150 activists were from Gandaki region and among them the large numbers were from Palpa and Myagdi districts (ShrishMagar, 2063 : 53-55). Besides these casualties, Magar people were overtly or covertly affected by the Maoist conflict.

In post 1990 democracy, the pro-Maoist parties, particularly the CPN *Masal* and *Ekata Kendra* (Unity Centre), who believed in a revolutionary war' and a slogan 'power comes through the barrel of a gun', united under the banner of the *Samyukta Jana Morcha, Nepal* (UPFN). *Masal* had a dominant role in most of the hill regions of the center west of Nepal, particularly districts like Rolpa, Rukhum, Salyan, Pyuthan, and Baglung. Due to the conflict between Maoists and the state, the NC, which ruled over the state since the first general election in 1991 and local election in 1992, mobilised the police force in these areas to suppress the Maoist activists. The Maoist party that participated in the first general election

and local election through the UPFN succeeded in mobilising the grass-roots people to favour them. Hence, it helped to build the popular leadership of the respected parties who had a very big role in the respected fields, particularly in Rolpa and Rukum districts for disseminating the Maoist ideology¹⁰². The history of insurgency against the despotic Rana regime can be traced back to Lakhan Thapa Magar's revolt to the Maoist revolution. Likewise, some other sacrificed their lives and while others were found deviated in the local level against the despotic ruling system in the west hill also reveal the Magar identity in politics. For instance, Kami Budha Magar from western hilly area received death penalty because he was alleged to have mobilised and organised the people against the existing authority and rulers for their despotic rule in 1955. Some Magar local leaders such as Tejendra Gharti Magar and Dhram Bahadur Rokka Magar had devoted their lives for the Magar community by utilizing the left ideology from the Panchyat to the Maoist (insurgency) era.

There is a long list of Magar activists who sacrificed their lives while organising the Magars and making them aware of any despotic authority and its suppressive policies, particularly from referendum till the beginning of the Maoist war (MNLF 2063). During the referendum period, the west Kham Magar region was the center of the left ideology. Hence, after the restoration of democracy in 1990 it has been regarded as the headquarters of the Maoists, where the local Magar activists played a significant role in mobilising and socialising the Magar people towards the Maoist ideology and Maoist war. Magar leaders, such as Barman Budha, Tej Man Gharti Magar, Lokendra Bista Magar, Tekendra Gharti Magar, Barsha Man Pun, Nanda Kishor Pun, Santos Budha Magar and other activists in the region, particularly among Magar villages, contributed significantly to the *Janayuddha* (people's war). The master minds, i.e. Puspa Kamal Dahal alias Prachanda, and Ram Bahadur Thapa Magar (Badal) engineered the Maoist insurgency on the intellectual grounds provided by Mohan Baidhya and Babu Ram Bhattarai¹⁰³.

Undoubtedly, the well-educated cadres in accordance with the Maoist radical ideology ensured that a bed rock principle for this revolution was that 'the state authority should be gained through people's war'. The activists were trained through the Marxist, Leninist and Maoist ideology, and in Nepalese context Prachanda Path for seeking one party dictatorship holding the power over the state. Through this doctrine of political ideology, the CPN - Maoist party trained the people including Magars at the local level that they would be privileged with power and resources on behalf of their own ethnic autonomous region, only

¹⁰² See the case study of the Barman Budha Magar (Anna de sales, 2005).

¹⁰³ Magars, constituting over the 7 percent of Nepali population, are the largest ethnic group in the country. And it is this very area of Magarant that is now bearing the brunt of the Maoist's peoples' war' launched by Mohan Vida aka Karan, Puspa Kamal Dahal aka Prachanda, along with Babura Bhattarai and Pampa Bhopal of the United People's Front (Shahar, 2004: 50).

when they control fully over the central authority of the state. Besides the ideological base, there were many other reasons why the war extended and disseminated rapidly through-out the country. The grievances of Dalits, ethnic groups and women, people concerning illiberal rule, bad-governance, rampant corruption, Kathmandu centralised authority and elites, authoritarian exercise by the activists and political parties, and increasing gap between the haves and the have-nots were all such factors that fuelled the Maoist war. These types of fertile ground ultimately allowed people to raise their voices, which were strategically catalysed by the Maoists in order to penetrate the war at each sector and every place at the local level. The nature of Gurilla Warfare and the Maoist ideology favoured launching the war from rural village to urban city (*Gaundekhi Shahar Gherne*). Therefore, the people from rural villages and unemployed, particularly ethnic groups and Dalits, were mobilised in the war. Among the ethnic groups, Magars played a dominating role in Maoist militias by participating in the People's Liberation Army (PLA). Two deputy commanders out of four, three division commanders out of seven, and many commanders out of the 21 battalions are from the Magar ethnic group¹⁰⁴.

¹⁰⁴ The information was collected through in-depth interview with Game Bahadur Shrewish, Treasurer in the Magar Liberation Front, and Coordinator of Gandaki Regional Coordination Committee of the Front (2063/9/16).

Accordingly the key characteristics of the Magars are Shojho and Bahadur (straight-forward and brave)¹⁰⁵. Though they are regarded as the bold and brave people, they are straightforward and they undoubtedly believe other people. Some times they may fall in the trap of the cunning people easily and may be betrayed. Therefore, according to Baral Magar¹⁰⁶, due to these nature of Magars, they are exploited by the rulers and state in various ways since the Rajput Thakuri and Khas migrant held the authority over their territory. Magars were victimised not only in the authoritarian Panchayat or previous period but also following the restoration of democracy in 1990 due to subjugation and marginalisation of the minority and the ethnic groups in the polity. Therefore, the Maoists are well-received by the Magars for their commitment to the establishment of Magarant autonomous region, for self-rule. Hence, Bom Kumari Budha¹⁰⁷ expressed her view that Magars significantly contributed to the Maoist War by being recruited in the PLA. She further stated that the People's War was successful due to the warfare skills and warrior natures of the Magars. The senior Magar activist and Maoist leader, Suresh Ale¹⁰⁸ said in his interview that the Magars and the Maoists manifestly benefit each other. Magars greatly contributed to the Maoists and their war by providing guerrillas and physical support, therefore, the Maoists war spread rapidly throughout the country. Likewise, due to influence in the Maoist's ideology and their significant presentation in the war, Magars are said to be the major underprivileged ethnic group in terms of identity and culture throughout the country and abroad.

8.3 Magars and the Maoist Politics

It has been found that most of the political parties are dominated by high caste hill groups and there are only some representations from the ethnic and other sectors of society. It has been mentioned in the previous chapter that with respect to other parties, the Maoist party is more inclusive in terms of participation of various castes and ethnic groups, including the Magars. Hence, it seems that some factors have been instrumental in shaping the Magars' role in the Maoist party. First, the Maoist war began in the Kham region in the west hills, the Athara Magarant territory. Due to the isolation of this region from the Nepali state, Magars have limited access to the state and its resources. Secondly, as dominant ideology of NCP-Mashal and NCP-Unity centre, the leftwing extremists, as the mother party of the CPN

¹⁰⁵ The senior Magar activist Barman Budha from Rolpa as the Magar dominated district, said in his interview that "the Dharma of the Magar is straight, not telling lie, as what we say we commit and operate in practice" (Anna de Sales, 'The Life History of Barman Budha' a paper presented in the seminar, Activism and Civil Society in South Asia, June, 24-26, Oxford).

¹⁰⁶ An interview with Dr. Keshar Jung Baral Magar (2063/7/22).

¹⁰⁷ An interview with Bom Kumari Budha Magar, an independent Magar leader from Kham region (2063/8/27).

¹⁰⁸ An interview with Suresh Ale Magar (2063/9/12).

Maoist, had shown more influence over the region. After the establishment of democracy in 1951, the Magar activists particularly belonging to the communist ideology have been found playing the oppositional role against the traditional regime. The other remaining radical groups are involved in various activities against the state in order to mobilise the people at the grass-roots level, such as peasants, workers, students and the junior staff of the government, in order to establish their particular ideology.

Since the foundation of the CPN - Maoist party in February 1995, in order to mobilise the *Janajatis* by the party ideology, its leaders have been advocating that 'ethnic rights can be acquired through fighting not by mercy'. Therefore, they preferred 'the bullet instead of the ballot'. Maoists launched the war by mobilising people, particularly the Magar farmers and Dalits from the rural areas in the west hills, against the state in order to establish a new people's democracy based on Maoism. Hence, they persuaded the discarded groups of people, like *Janajatis*, to participate in the war. Maoists strategically mobilised the underprivileged, marginalised and excluded people towards their ends with provoking their century-long grievances and dissatisfactions regarding the state. They promised that they would have ruling power and decision-making authority over their historical dominant territory. Therefore, through mobilisation of the people from excluded strata and geography, Maoists succeeded in extending their peoples' war through most of the hills and rural territories. Hence, the war was launched and significantly extended on the basis of Magars and their rural territory which was geographically favourable to the warfare (de sales 2002).

There are significant numbers of Magars in the Maoist people's liberation army. The martyrs list also shows that more Magars have sacrificed their lives for Maoist war than any other ethnic group. Both in the Maoist party structures and in PLA, the Magars are well-represented. Three Magar leaders from the Kham region have had representative roles in the central committee of the Maoist party. In addition to this, the Magar ethnic group is significantly represented in the Maoist political party relative to other parties at the local level, for instance Kaski, Myagdi and Palpa districts (see Tables 6.1 and 8.1). Likewise, the fact that Magars have two deputy-commanders out of the four in the PLA shows that this ethnic group has significantly dominated the Maoist militia. However, representation and participation do not necessarily mean that there is any significant role in the decision making process and resources of the state. Therefore, a query could be raised in this context. In addition to representation in the party and PLA, whether the Maoists want to empower the marginal groups of people including Magars in state affairs along with promoting their ethnic identity, or they have just catalysed their grievances for their power seeking mission. In this regard, the perception of Magars at the local level about the Maoist politics and war are analysed in the succeeding sections.

Maoists have extensively mobilised Magars towards their war and party politics. Moreover, Magars have the decisive role in the Maoist's militias and many Magar activists have a prominent role in disseminating Maoist politics at the local level, particularly in Magar-dominated districts and villages. Undoubtedly, the Magars have offered local leadership and have shown their warfare skills in the country and abroad. Magars have significantly succeeded in disseminating their ethnic values throughout the country and abroad and their reputation as those who have greatly contributed to the Peoples' War with their involvement in the Maoist militia. On the other hand, some Magars think that the Maoists strategically used Magars, rather than actually empowering them. A 45-year-old Magar activist in Kaski said that the Maoists had cleverly exploited the Magar sentiments in order to gain power. He further expressed his view that if the Maoists are really pleased and recognise Magar's contribution, they could have been appointed in the dignified decision making posts of the state when they ruled twice after the April 2006 revolution. Similarly, a young Magar activist in Palpa told in his interview that while some Magars from the west Kham region have been mobilised as local Maoist leaders and a few have been represented in its central body, Magars from other parts, like Barha Magarant region, have not been mobilised in this respect. His view is quite close to the views of two senior activists of Myagdi and Kaski who said that those Magars who participated in the Maoist district committees are either from the west Kham region or are newly migrated to this region. Thus, Maoists do not have a strong influence over the Magars in this region. It is because the Magars from Kham region, the Peoples' War based territory, have contributed to the *Janayuddh*, and the leaders who have been socialised through the war have the responsibility to organise and mobilise the general people in favour of the Maoist party.

On the other side it seems that the Maoist party has recruited non-Magar leaders in the Magarant autonomous region and as party heads in almost all of its district committees. Hence, it selected non-Magar candidacies in Myagdi district and other Magar dominant constituencies¹⁰⁹. Therefore, some activists argue that the Maoist party has also been dominated by high caste hill people and they nominated a few Magars as symbolic representatives from local and the central level in order to seek their popular support. In Kaski, an old Magar activist stated that 'the ethnic federalism which has been encouraged by the Maoists is just for fulfilling their interest in seeking power rather than in empowering deprived ethnic and other groups'. Those who oppose the Maoist politics think that Maoist party would have the dominance in this region through their ethnic wings, MNLF. Almost all ethnic wings are not free to decide their policy by themselves. Rather, they are always guided by that in-charge of the wings that are almost non-Magars and they follow party ideology rather than the ethnic interest of the Magars in general.

¹⁰⁹ See name list of the candidacies in the CA election, www.electioncomission.com.np

So far the ethnic demands are concerned, particularly proportional representation and ethnic federalism, the ethnic organisations have been articulating and integrating from time to time through their activism even before the beginning of the Maoist war in 1996. As mentioned in the above discussion, it seems that the Maoists have strategically used these demands into their party's favour. Maoists mobilised the ethnic and Dalit people in order to seek power and they catalysed their grievances by advocating and provoking in order to show Maoists consideration towards their century-long exploitation, oppression and deprivation. Hence, it has been a part of their basic strategy of Maoist politics in Nepal to win the downtrodden sections of Nepali society as infantry for their political ambitions (Kramer, 2005).

In a settlement of the Histan VDC, where only Magars live, the researcher came across a small group including 7 people. They expressed an interest in mission concerning their territory. He found them almost entirely positive in their beliefs towards the Maoists. They were impressed and significantly influenced by the Maoist mission. Some young people said they were very much impressed by observations of Maoist fighters. They had found almost all young Magars like them devoting their life to the Peoples' War for Maoist rule and recruitment in the PLA. Therefore, they joined the MNLF and the Maoist party. One activist voiced his opinion that, along with the Maoist rule over the country, Magarant would be given to the Magars, to rule themselves. They also stated that they found Maoists very active as they performed cultural programmes from time and again and after the programmes were over, they left the village immediately and moved to the next village. They were successful in strengthening their organisation and increase their supporters. Recently, they have appointed the local activists to the Maoist party and its people's government at the village level. Moreover, while conducting research it was found in most of the villages and hamlets of his field areas in Myagdi that Maoists tried to impress the women by launching the anti-alcohol and anti-gambling campaign.

The local Magar activists, including the teacher at the high school in the Histan village of Myagdi, told the researcher that in fact they wanted to see the Maoist government. They expected that this party could do much for development of the villages. They further stated that only the Maoist policy would have their ethnic federal state for the overall progress of the Magar people in general. Among them, some were the UML activists; they believed that the Maoists have a clear-cut vision, better than that of their own party, in order to uplift and empower the Magar people and their society. A young teacher in the Rima village of the Histan VDC of Myagdi told the researcher that he was really dissatisfied with his affiliation with the UML party because he did not find the UML party giving preferences to the basic needs of the people and the basic infrastructures of village development, but rather giving more attention to obtaining power in government. On the other hand, he believed that the

Maoists were going to empower the Magars and promote the Magar identity by providing basic needs and development through the Magarant ethnic autonomous region. Therefore, he made a prediction that the Maoists would have a good image and would rule over the state with the support of people at grass- roots including Magars in general. Similar observations were also made by those Magar activists who supported the Maoists in Myagdi, Palpa and Kaski districts.

Besides the positive arguments mentioned above, some Magars had different attitudes regarding the Maoist politics. According to them, the Maoists have just exploited the sentiments of the Magars and other excluded groups in order to gain power and control over the state. A woman activist in Tikot village of Histan-Myagdi said that in the name of social transformation, Maoists hindered and interfered in some of their jobs. The Mother-groups here have conducted some social reforms and small development works, initiated by them. The chairman of the mother group argued that the mother group stopped rampant alcoholism, gambling and other anti-social activities in the village. Moreover, the group also constructed path-way and tried to preserve the water source and forest. But they were not allowed to do these tasks independently when the Maoists entered their village. Maoists said that the village was under their control. They imposed decisions upon the villagers and local institutions, saying that all jobs and rules could be done only with their authority. Local institutions, including the Mother group, were only allowed to do their activities with the Maoists. Maoists even handled some cases of theft, gambling and alcoholism. During the anti-alcohol activism, they destroyed alcohol-making pots but kept and drank fine alcohol. Likewise, they caught the oxen of villagers and ate beef. Some of the villagers were also compelled to eat, a few among them started to eat oxen then after. After some days, the Maoist fighters left and have not again appeared in the village. However, the Mother group and other local institutions left their jobs due to the Maoist threats. Therefore, the chairman of the mothers group argued that she does not like the Maoists.

During his field study, the researcher found that the case of a Head Master's murder was more debatable in the Baranja VDC of Myagdi. Those who were not Maoists condemned the Maoists for killing the headmaster of the Baranja village. As many other villagers, the teachers believed he was innocent, but the Maoists killed him brutally and cruelly. A senior Magar women activist stated that 'the Maoists have no mercy; they killed the head master inhumanly.' This view was also held by most of those commoners who did not support the Maoists blindly. On the other side, those who strongly supported the Maoists believed that he spied on Maoist activities and informed the state personnel. Therefore, he received the death penalty for his activity against the Maoists. But a school teacher at the village, who had good relation with the head master and who also sympathised with the Maoists, said that it was not clear whether he spied or not and that even if he did so, then the death

penalty was excessive. Likewise, the former chairman of the VDC also said in his interview that the Maoists wanted to establish a one-party system which would not be possible in a plural democracy. They killed many innocent persons, demanded big donations, and inflicted mental and physical tortures on those who were not in their favour or who opposed their cruel and inhuman activities. He further stated that not allowing other ideologies than their own is fundamentally anti-democratic. The VDC chairman was also imprisoned for three weeks by the Maoists for opposing their action (see in detail: Appendix 10).

In Somadi VDC of Palpa, two activists affiliated with UML and NC respectively stated in their evaluation that the Maoists could do anything. According to them, Maoists used the young Magars by involving them to fight against the state. Magar and Dalits were exploited badly and were forced to follow the Maoist ideology and interest. They further stated that the Maoists claim themselves that they launched the war for emancipating the poor and marginalised ethnicity. However, they killed the general people and seized their property blaming them for supporting the state, which is controversial. Undoubtedly, it is nice to hear about the Magarant autonomous region for the Magars, but they doubted how it could be possible to establish distinct ethnic province for particular janajati, whereas, almost all caste and ethnic groups are in minority. Not any ethnic group homogeneously holds the majority in any particular region and have been living in village together with other ethnic and caste groups since unknown past. Likewise, an UML activist of Palpa, who was also a member of the interim parliament, stated his belief that the Maoists strategically used the grievances of excluded people, including the Magars. He further said that people's will is necessary in order to rule over the country and it should be achieved only through peaceful means, instead of spreading terror through guns and violence. He also questioned the killing of the innocent Magars in rural villages in the name of Magar empowerment. In this regard, he declared that the Maoists do not have a positive image among the Magars like him, particularly in his constituency of eastern Palpa where many Magars are settled¹¹⁰. Likewise, similar type of argument was also expressed by Nar Kumari Pun Magar, a UML activist of the Myagdi. She said with the researcher that "if the Maoists really recognise the Magars contribution in their mission and want to empower them, why do they kill or torture the innocent Magars?"¹¹¹ She thought that 'Maoists are extending their party activities through violence and terror rather than holding the will of the general people through peaceful means so that people support them due to the threat of gun and their action. Some activists in Kaski did not want to talk about Maoists because of fear from them. Likewise, some other argued that they did not believe the Maoist's mission for seeking one party dictatorship. He believed that different political parties flourish and enjoy privileges in a democracy.

¹¹⁰ An interview with Bhadra Bahadur Thapa Magar, Palpa (2063/9/7)

¹¹¹ An interview with Nar Kumari Pun Magar, Myagdi (2063/5/26)

Through the discussion above, two conclusions can be drawn: support or opposition to the Maoist politics. Undoubtedly, some activists and ordinary Magars in the villages are positively influenced by the Maoists' activities and policy of Magar empowerment. They supported the Maoists for their encouragement to liberate the exploited, oppressed, deprived people. In some of the villages where the state army operated in the name for oppressing the Maoist, people became supporters of the Maoists due to the horror and cruel acts of the state personnel. Those Magars who were affiliated with the Maoist party and the MNLF praised their commitment to search a new people's democracy. Almost all believed that with Maoist rule over the country, the deprived and oppressed people, including Magars, will be privileged and empowered. Therefore, they hoped that the Maoists' mission to seize state authority would succeed and they fully expected to see Maoist rule in the state soon. On the other side, some commoners did not believe the Maoists due to their brutality towards ordinary people and their irrational so-called *janakarbhai* to those who opposed or criticised them. Moreover, some activists affiliated with other parties other than Maoists thought that the Maoists have strategically used the Magars to seek power for their own end. They believed, neither the Magarant ethnic state with a right to self-determination is possible in the heterogeneous Nepali society, nor the Magars will benefit in the Maoists party. They perceive that Magars are straight forward and they immediately believe in people and therefore, they have been exploiting since history.

8.4 Magars' Perception on the Maoist War

The research was conducted in six rural villages and three urban centres of the Western Region. Among these areas, Baranja village of Myagdi followed by Somadi (Bhagani) village of Palpa, were the most victimized during the Maoists conflict than other places of the study. There were also a few incidents in Histan village, but the rest of the areas were not significantly affected during the conflict. The Maoists carried out massive attack in the headquarters of both districts in 2004. But they could not hold the district headquarters for a full day and the state was able to hold its power. But the Maoists destroyed most of the government offices and the researcher saw some of the scenes while he was in the field. Besides these major incidents, some other cross-firings and casualties had occurred in some other villages during the fight between the Maoists and the state army. Those affected by the conflict spread word of their victimizations and, in the process reports were greatly exaggerated. Therefore, these pictures created fear among the ordinary people. Then they calculate knowingly and unknowingly that some sort of place is dangerous in terms of conflict and violence. By such process people in general were greatly terrified with the Maoist war. Such experiences were also heard in pre field work on Baranja and Somadi.

The case study has already mentioned the story of Baranja, but as for Somadi, people declared that it was badly affected during the Maoist conflict. People said that the place was

very dangerous and that the researcher might not be allowed to go and to do his research work. It was supposedly one of the forts of the Maoists where they had their own radio station. Therefore, some Magar activists in Pokhara and Tansen advised him not to go to this village. Since it was the most dangerous village out of the 67 total villages of the Palpa district, the researcher became very eager to go to the area and to get first hand experience. When he went to Somadi, however, he did not get any terrifying atmosphere that he had heard of before going to the village. There was one major incident in which the Nepali Army shot dead 6 Maoist activists in a home of the Bhagani of Somadi VDC, which is close to Shiddheshwar VDC. This VDC, which has been always Magar-dominated, is very far from Tansen, the district headquarters of Palpa. The researcher went to Bhagani and met the owner of the house, where the incident had occurred and who was also victimised by the Nepali Army. According to Shyam Darlimi, he was tortured and beaten very badly but his life was saved with the support of the local leaders of the Nepali Congress and the UML. They gave statements in his favour, saying that he was not a Maoist. He told the researcher that his daughter had joined the PLA, and through her influences he became a Maoist. Previously, he was affiliated with UML and then the NC. The researcher was worried when he did not support him at first and was found reluctant to assist in the research work. But later he realised what he had done and allowed the researcher to go ahead for his field work. This village has a connection with the remote corner, far from the centre of Somadi, so that many people from the same VDC never visited this place. Bhagani, as the Magar-dominated village, is actually very close to the next VDC called Shidheshwar, where most of the people are Magars and supposedly had the Maoists under their control. The local activists told the researcher that a leader of NC in Palpa who was also a member of HoR at that time moved to this village from Shidheshwar to Somadi in order to gain political benefit. However, the situation there was turning into peaceful environment when the researcher was there in October, 2006.

8.4.1 Information about the Maoist People's War

The Maoist war that was conducted in between 1996 to 2006 has been a major issue in Nepalese politics. Though it emerged in the west Kham Magar territory, the war expanded to most of the rural parts of Nepal. Therefore, it is believed that almost all people at the local level have the knowledge about the Maoist war. The following table deals about the knowledge of the Magars towards the Maoist war.

Table No. 8.1
Have you heard about the Maoist People's war?

District	Voters			Activists	Frequency		
	Yes	No	Total	Yes	Yes	No	Total

Kaski	87 87.0%	13 13.0%	100 100.0%	25 100.0%	112 89.6%	13 10.4%	125 100.0%
Myagdi	94 94.0%	6 6.0%	100 100.0%	25 100.0%	119 95.2%	6 4.8%	125 100.0%
Palpa	94 94.0%	6 6.0%	100 100.0%	25 100.0%	119 95.2%	6 4.8%	125 100.0%
Total	275 91.7%	25 8.3%	300 100.0%	75 100.0%	350 93.3%	25 6.7%	375 100.0%

Source: Field Survey, 2006.

According to table no. 8.1, 350 (93.3%) out of a total of 375 respondents knew about the Maoist War, but only 25 (6.7%) stated that they had no idea on the matter. It seems that among these, some were really ignorant about the war and some of them did not want to say anything about it. Out of the 25 respondents, 52 percent are from Kaski where the effect of the Maoist conflict was relatively less severe than Myagdi and Palpa. According to the above table, among the 350 respondents who have the knowledge about this conflict; i.e. 100% activists are well-informed, followed by 91.7 percent commoners. Only 8.3 percent of the general voters seem to have no idea about the Maoist conflict. Relatively, people from activist background rather than non-activist, urban rather than rural, educated rather than non-educated, young rather than older are found to be well-informed about the Maoist War (see in Appendix: 8). Out of the total 300 voters, only 25 respondents told that they knew nothing about the war. Similarly, two respondents from Histan VDC of Myagdi and Pipal Danda of Palpa respectively said that they had never heard about the Maoist War. Likewise, almost all the respondents, who stated their ignorance about the war from Kaski followed by Palpa and Myagdi districts and claimed not to have heard about the War, in reality did not want to talk about it. In Nirmal Pokhari of Kaski, a well-known NC activist said that the war was not favourable and it has brought crises to the lives of ordinary people. Therefore, he argued that it should be forgotten. It seems that some of those who claimed ignorance of the conflict were either motivated by possible threats from the side of conflict or underestimated the Maoist War.

8.4.2 Causes of the Maoist People's War

The Maoist War directly and indirectly affected the life of the state and its people. There were many reasons behind launching Maoist insurgency and getting its shape throughout the country. A woman activist from a rural village in the Kaski district stated in her interview that those who were unemployed were recruited in the Maoist militia for getting job and money. A 50 year-old political activist in Myagdi, stated in his interview that due to the exclusionary nature of the state most of the Magars are marginalised and unemployed.

Therefore, they were involved in the fight because they were recruited in the militia. He further stated that in their adolescence, it was easy to mobilize Magars towards fighting and they enjoyed playing with guns and war. Likewise, a 45 year-old activist of the Janamukti party in Tansen, the district headquarter of Palpa, said that the exclusionary character of the state and bad governance were the major causes for the spread of war. However, in this regard, Magars think that the war occurred mainly due to unemployment and poverty, corruption and bad governance, and the exclusionary nature of the state. The following table depicts the causes of the Maoist People's war.

Table No. 8.2

In your opinion what are the Reasons behind the Maoist's war?

Causes of the Maoists' War	Voters				Activists			
	Kaski	Myagdi	Palpa	Total	Kaski	Myagdi	Palpa	Total
Unemployment and Poverty	66 66.0%	68 68.7%	66 66.7%	200 67.1%	21 84.0%	13 52.0%	15 60.0%	49 65.3%
Corruption and miss-governance	46 46.0%	29 29.3%	51 51.5%	126 42.3%	16 64.0%	16 64.0%	19 76.0%	51 68.0%
Government's suppression	5 5.0%	22 22.2%	20 20.2%	47 15.8%	3 12.0%	9 36.0%	6 24.0%	18 24.0%
Exclusionary state	44 44.0%	54 54.5%	44 44.4%	142 47.6%	13 52.0%	20 80.0%	18 72.0%	51 68.0%
Maoist's desire for power	34 34.0%	32 2.3%	11 1.1%	77 25.8%	10 40.0%	10 40.0%	8 32.0%	28 37.3%
Murder of King Birendra	5 5.0%	7 7.1%	3 3.0%	15 5.0%	3 12.0%	2 8.0%	4 16.0%	9 12.0%
Do not know	24 24.0%	11 11.1%	17 7.2%	52 17.4%				
Total	100 224.0%	99 225.2%	99 204.1%	298 221.0%	25 264.0%	25 280.0%	25 280.0%	75 274.6%

Percent based on Multiple Responses

Source: Field Survey, 2006

As per table no. 8.2, majority of Magar voters (67%) believe unemployment and poverty are the main causes of the Maoist war. According to them, the young generation of Magars, particularly who were unemployed and had poor economic background had been involved in the war for two basic reasons. First, they found a job and when they were recruited in the

PLA and the militia force. Second, most of them were orientated by the Maoist politics with the advent of insurgency and belief that they would be privileged under the Magarant autonomous region after the *Janayuddha*. On the other hand, according to table no. 8.2, activists seem more in favour of the argument that the exclusionary state, corruption and bad governance are the basic causes of the war. Most of the activists (68 percent) from different places of Kaski, Myagdi and Palpa districts are of the view that Magars are excluded and marginalised in state affairs. That is why many Magars were involved in the Maoist war or politics, believing that it will empower, and gain access and influence in the affairs and resources of the state. Similarly, 68 percent of the activists believe that corruption and bad-governance that flourished during the parties' governments following the political change in 1990 are also major causes of expansion of the Maoist war. Likewise, more than 65 percent of the activists express that unemployment and poverty were also the factors for spreading the Maoist war at the grass-roots level.

As depicted by the above table, 37.3 percent of the activists followed by 26 percent of voters perceive that the Maoist's desire for power was one of the main reasons behind the Maoist conflict. Likewise, some Magars (24 percent of the activists and 16 percent of the voters) state that government suppression was also the case for spreading the Maoist war. Respondents from Myagdi and Palpa, where the people were more affected by the conflict rather than in Kaski, emphasised more about the suppression of the government. Likewise, more than 37 percent of the activists followed by around 26 percent of the voters believe that the Maoist war was conducted to seek state power. Most of the activists expressed their view in interviews with researcher that along with war strategy the Maoists want to acquire more control over the state authority by exerting strong influence over more and more people and territory.

The above mentioned table no. 8.2 also states that 5 percent of the voters followed by 12 percent of the activists argue that the assassination of King Birendra and his kin was also a cause for extending the Maoist war extensively at a grass-root level. Most of the respondents who supported this statement said that if the King was not safe, and if the Nepali Army could not save him, then no one could be safe in the country. It was also a new agenda for increasing Maoist values, as well as disseminating the anti-monarchial and anti-NR sentiment among the people in general. Even those, who supported King Birendra and the monarchial system, said that after the royal massacre, the popularity of the Kingship became weak and the war had disseminated with anti-monarchial sentiment in favour of the Maoists. The Chairman of the NMA-Kaski, Myagdi and Palpa unanimously argued in their interviews that the royal massacre was the major factor in disseminating the anti-monarchial phenomenon at the grass-root level. Therefore, after the success of the *janandolan-II*,

monarchy faced the deepest crisis in its history and ultimately collapsed¹¹². On the other hand, out of the 298 voters, more than 17 percent responded that they had no idea in this regard. However, the cross tabulation analyses show that the activists, relatively the young, well-educated, and urban respondents placed the emphasis on unemployment and poverty as the major causes of the People's War, in comparison to the respondents from non-activist, old age, low-educated, rural parts (see the Appendix: 8). Likewise, the respondents from Myagdi and Palpa rather than Kaski where, during the war, the Maoist conflicts were extreme, have significantly pointed out that the government suppressions also caused the spread of the Maoist's war in many rural parts¹¹³.

The researcher had an interesting experience while talking about the Maoist war to a young Magar boy in a rural village of Kaski. His old and blind father, who was listening quietly to our talk, asked the researcher whether he believed or not in the Maoist mission. The researcher responded that he was an independent researcher and he was here to collect their arguments and views for writing a thesis. Then the person asked whether it would be exposed publicly or not. When researcher said it would be kept secret and used only for writing a thesis without mentioning the name of any respondent, then he expressed his view that the Maoists had launched the war purely to rule over the country. He further forecasted that the Maoists would not fully succeed in controlling the country. Therefore, if they got opportunity to share power in the central authority, then they would abandon their so-called people's war. He concluded by saying that due to our social culture, nothing would be significantly changed in favour of the people in general, even if the Maoist ruled over the country. To the researcher's query as to how he could forecast such things he replied "Although I can not see, I listen well". He used to listen to the radio for acquainting the news of state and he said that he is worried about violence and conflict due to the Maoists. He knew some of the Maoists in his locality and sometimes he had the opportunity to listen to their talks. According to him, most of them talked about how to collect more and more money and how to use action to those who denied to give the donation or who might be against their mission. It is more or less found in reality that Maoists are not ruling the country in order to do better for nation and people rather they are concerned more about how to control fully by their party over the state and its authority.

¹¹² They expressed their views in different interviews that if there had been no royal massacre then Gyanendra could not have become King and would never have to go against democracy. They thought that if King Birendra were to be present, the anti-monarchical sentiments would not have emerged. Therefore, monarchy and democracy could potentially cooperate in Nepal.

¹¹³ The wars were conducted in both districts' headquarters launched by the Maoist people's army where many security personnel from both sides were killed and millions of properties were destroyed.

8.4.3 The Resolution of the Maoist War

The violence occurred to a great extent in Nepal as a result of the conflict between the Maoists and the State. Because of the Maoists conflict, the life of the people was very uncomfortable. In many rural parts, where the conflict was extreme, people felt insecure and were confined in their houses. They feared to communicate what they saw or heard. Moreover, some told the researcher that at that time nobody knew when and where one would be threatened and tortured and sometimes the life might be in crises from the Maoist or state. In such a definitive atmosphere, people in general wanted peace and tranquility, along with the resolution of the Maoist conflict. Therefore, hoping for an overall solution to the political conflict, Nepali people have extensively participated in the democratic movement which is known as the April (2006) Revolution. However, Magars from the west hills expressed their views differently on the resolution of the Maoist conflict through surveys and interviews. Some data mentioned in this research might be irrelevant in contemporary politics, because the field study was conducted, particularly after succeeding *janandolan-II* and pre- peace pact held between Maoists and state. Although, the respondents and interviewers expressed different views on the Maoists' war and Maoist politics, their views more or less resemble in practice. However, following table discusses the Magars' view on how to resolve the Maoist conflict.

Table No. 8.3

How the Maoist conflict can be resolved?

Means for Resolve	Voters				Activists			
	Kaski	Myagdi	Palpa	Total	Kaski	Myagdi	Palpa	Total
Peace negotiation	30 30.0%	30 30.3%	45 45.5%	105 35.2%	9 36.0%	12 48.0%	8 32.0%	29 38.7%
Employment and proportional development	48 48.0%	42 42.4%	44 44.4%	134 45.0%	9 36.0%	13 52.0%	16 64.0%	38 50.7%
Coalition goes. including Maoist	68 68.0%	65 65.7%	41 41.4%	174 58.4%	18 72.0%	14 56.0%	15 60.0%	47 62.7%
Election for CA	24 24.0%	24 24.2%	8 8.1%	56 18.8%	9 36.0%	12 48.0%	9 36.0%	30 40.0%
Proportional Reps. and inclusion state	28 28.0%	35 35.3%	44 44.4%	107 35.9%	16 64.0%	14 56.0%	15 60.0%	45 60.0%
Republic state	6	13	5	24	2	6	3	11

	6.0%	13.1%	5.0%	8.0%	8.0%	24.0	12.0%	14.7%
Do not know	25 25.0%	14 14.1%	17 17.2%	56 18.8%				
Total	100	99	99	298	25	25	25	75
Percent	229.0%	225.0%	206.0%	220.1%	252.0%	284.0%	264.0%	266.8%

Percent Based on Multiple Responses

Source: Field Survey, 2006.

The above table shows that 100 percent of the activists, followed by 81.2 percent of the voters, argued their views on the means to resolve the War, whereas, 18.8 percent of the voter responded that either they did not like to say or that they had no idea regarding the issue. Out of the 375 total respondents, the majority of the voters (58.4 percent) and the activists (60.7 percent) think that a coalition government including the Maoists would be the best way for resolving the conflict. Beyond this, 45 percent of the voters give a high priority to employment and proportional development, followed by 50.7 percent of the activists. Likewise, 60 percent of the activists and 36 percent of the voters like to stress proportional system and inclusive democracy which is the best means for resolving the Maoist war. In addition to these, over 35 percent of the non-activists and around 39 percent of the activists both prefer a peace negotiation as the best means for resolving the conflict. Through a comprehensive peace agreement, signed after the democratic mass movement of 2006, the Maoists became a part of the formal government and the war was brought to an end. Likewise, the above table no. 8.3 reveals that 40 percent of the activists followed by around 19 percent of the voters believed that an election for the constituent assembly should be held as the Maoists had been demanding it for a long time as a permanent resolution to the conflict. Some others, around 15 percent of the activists and 8 percent of general Magars think that if Nepal was declared a Republic state then the Maoist conflict would be resolved.

Magars at the local level believe that the Maoist war took place in many rural parts because of the unemployment and poverty that is commonly found in these areas. Hence, the exclusionary nature of the state was also a major factor in mobilising Magars and other under-privileged groups in the Maoist insurgency. In addition, there were many other reasons why the Maoists succeeded in their politics, along with mobilisation of the people at the grass-root level. The existing political environment created an atmosphere which manifestly and latently favoured the Maoists' desire to rule over the country. This is in fact the ultimate goal of the Maoist party. Therefore, most of the respondents argued that a coalition government including the Maoists was the major means of resolving a conflict which has infected the country for the last 12 years. However, this output may be the lessons for all mainstream political parties through which they have to rule jointly for peace, development and prosperity in the country. To some extent, political parties have

implemented the views expressed by Magar respondents at the grass-roots level in the interim period, April revolution and the comprehensive peace accord held between the government and the Maoists in May, 2006. In addition to this, the respondents emphasised employment and proportional development on the one hand and proportional representation and inclusion on the other. These counteracting means of resolution are the basic factors that assist in reducing the grievances of the people and the discriminatory and exclusionary nature of the state.

The Maoist war began by following a strong revolutionary ideology for ruling over the country through one party dictatorship. The war rapidly extended throughout the country due to cooperation of the marginalized and excluded people hoping emancipation from their grievances. Hence, the ethnic people like Magars significantly contributed to the insurgency, because the Maoist had promised them more political role in the state affairs. Therefore, almost all activists express their views through their interviews that if the excluded and unprivileged groups like Magar could not be represented in the state resources and decision-making bodies in proportion to their strength of the population, then the conflict would never end. These beliefs were substantively found among Magars at a local level, however, these are the contemporary trends seen in the national agendas in ethnic politics of Nepal.

8.5 Conclusion

CPN-Maoist is one of major political parties which believe in the ideologies of Marxism, Leninism and Maoism. This party initiated the People's War in February-1996 in order to rule the country on the ground of its basic philosophy - 'proletarian dictatorship'. Although the state discarded the close system and entered into open democracy in 1990, the parliamentary parties which had been ruling the state since that time could not fulfill the demands and aspirations of the people on the one hand and could not manage bad-governance and corruption on the other. Hence, due to the exclusionary nature of the state, people like ethnic, Dalits, women and some small political parties, have been marginalised in the state polity. On these grounds, Maoists began the armed insurgency by utilizing the grievances of the people from marginal strata and regions. After two years of insurgency, the Maoists have strategically established various ethnic wings including MNLF for mobilising the ethnic population towards Maoist politics. Likewise, Magars, particularly from the west hills, have significantly contributed to the Maoist war particularly through membership in the MNLF and PLA.

Although major part of the field study of this research was conducted in pre and post April revolution and the comprehensive peace agreement was held, almost all political phenomena occurred in accordance with the views and expectations of Magars as delivered through their interviews and survey. Most of the Magars perceived that the power seeking

mission as per their ideological ground was the main mission of the Maoist war. Besides this, unemployment and poverty including marginalised and disadvantaged condition of the Dalit and ethnic people were the factors that help to spread the war throughout the country. Therefore, almost all believed that without giving reasonable space in the state authority to them the Maoist conflict could not be resolved. Likewise, to manage the conflict for ever the discriminatory and exclusionary nature of the state should be changed into inclusion of the disadvantaged and marginalised group of the people and state efforts to be centered on the economic development of the people at the grass roots level. After the peace accord, a coalition government including Maoists was formed in order to resolve the conflict and hold the CA election. Similarly, the PR system and inclusive democracy followed by the employment and proportional development seem to be the major demands of identity politics from the Magars and ethnic activism. Through the comprehensive peace accord and CA election, Maoists became the major part of the formal authority of the Nepali state. Therefore, Maoists have to be more responsible in order to implement the comprehensive peace agreement and provide access to Magars in power and resources of the state. These means of resolution undoubtedly seem to be the basic grounds for negotiation between state and ethnic forces, along with reducing the grievances of the people, and the discriminatory and exclusionary nature of the state.

Magars in the villages are strongly influenced by Maoists activities and policies for their empowerment. Some people support and are affiliated with the Maoists, hoping that the Maoists' efforts are directed towards alleviating their poverty along with providing basic needs. Some others believe that Maoists will develop the country and society if they rule over the state. In the villages where the state army conducted operations with horrible cruelty against the Maoists and villagers, some of the people became supporters of the Maoists. Hence, some Magars at the local level have been oriented through the Maoists ideology assuring that poverty, unemployment and centralised authority will be discarded in a people's democracy which will happen only when the Maoists take over state power. Moreover, those Magars who have been politically educated through the MNLF claim that they will have ruling power in their own ethnic Magarant territory and along with empowerment and good access to resources and power of the state. They hoped that it is the only way for a prosperous and progressive Magar culture and society. Therefore, they hope that the Maoist mission succeeds in order to achieve an ethnic autonomous region for the Magars. On the other hand, some commoners do not believe the Maoists due to their brutality towards ordinary people and their irrational so-called *janakarbhai* over those who either oppose or criticise them whether by policy or by their behaviour. Some Magar activists perceive that the Maoists do not in practice support the empowerment of Magars in state affairs. On the contrary, only through slogans they have exploited the sentiment in order to mobilise the Magars towards Maoist own power seeking ends. Likewise, those

activists who are affiliated with other parties rather than the Maoists believed neither the Magarant ethnic state would be possible in the heterogeneous society of Nepal nor the Magars would be privileged through the Maoist party in practice. Therefore, such people believed that the Magar and other ethnic minority will be privileged if there is consensus among the major political parties for making affirmative actions and providing ethnic and political rights with promoting their ethnic identity. On the other side, due to the mobilisation of Magars at the grass-roots level by the Maoists and MNLF through peaceful means, particularly since the peace process, the Magar in general expect that the Maoists can solve the ethnic and other problems of the state. Therefore, Magars seem increasingly supportive of the Maoist party for their slogans such as 'ethnic people should be emancipated from their centuries-long exploitation, suppression and deprivation'. All marginalised people, including Magars, will be empowered politically through gaining access to the decision making process and resources by ruling themselves in their own ethnic territory, along with the fusion of class liberation with ethnic liberation. However, it seems that some factors are crucial in order to integrate Magar demands with Maoist politics. First, some are ideologically Maoists by the socialisation in the course of insurgency and then after through participating in the activities and programmes of this party and MNLF. Second, some dissatisfied and underprivileged activists of various political parties are attracted in the Maoist party for countering leaders of their earlier parties and to get personal benefits. A few of them have succeeded to hold leadership position in the Maoist institutions and public post of the state. Third, some others support the Maoist due to economic and psychological coercion exerted by its activists at the local level. Nevertheless, the Maoist party and MNLF appear as the liberators for some Magars at the grass roots level hoping that these are the better means of development in their backward society and worse life.

CHAPTER VIII

MAGAR ETHNICITY AND CPN (MAOIST)

8.1 The CPN (Maoists) and the People's War

The Communist Party of Nepal (Maoists) [CPN-(M)]¹¹⁴ launched its insurgency with the name of “People’s War” since February 13th 1996 from the western hills of the Magar dominated-Kham Magarant region. Obviously, the Magar are highly affected by the CPN-Maoist’s successful fusion of class war and ethnic uprising. This will be explained, in the following sections, with micro level stories of sampled areas. Before digging the micro level picture, here is a brief narration of the Maoist insurgency at the macro level. It is said that during a decade long Maoist insurgency, around 15000 people were killed, thousands displaced and millions latently and manifestly victimized. The war spread throughout the country, particularly in rural areas. Hence, overtly or covertly, people were much affected by the conflict from both sides, either the Maoist militia or the government forces. Therefore, it was believed that most of the people are well informed about the War. Formal and informal means of communication throughout the War and conflict spread news of violence, destruction or possession of public and private property, explosions, firing, fighting, abandon, and physical torture. The news both in favour of or against the Maoists was disseminated and communicated among the people through personal communication or media during the Maoist conflict. In this context, the political culture of the Magars and their attitudes towards Maoist politics and warfare require further exploration.

Before launching their insurgency, the Maoists submitted 40-point demands to the government through Dr. Babu Ram Bhattarai, the leader of the United People’s Front, Nepal (UPFN) on 17th January, 1996. These demands covered three broad sub-groups about nationality, people’s democracy, and livelihood¹¹⁵. The state power and authority was solely controlled by the Nepali Congress most of the time and by the UML for some time following the restoration of multiparty democracy in 1990. These parties at first did not react seriously to those demands, while they were engaged in forming and dismissing the governments for seeking control over the power and resources of the state. As a result, the insurgency began with the desire to implement the Maoist philosophy, but the basis of its expansion was provided by the contextual ecological atmosphere composed of multiple factors. The expression of outrage against age-old grievances resulting from inequalities embedded in

¹¹⁴ For, the history of the Communist party of Nepal and the Maoist see, Rose 1969, Hachhethu 2002, Kari and Bhattarai 2003, Nick son 2004, Sharma 2063VS, etc.

¹¹⁵ About the 40 point demands, see in detail Argon Kari and Binod Bhattarai (ends), *Whose War?* (2004), Annex-10, Page: 176-179.

the Nepali socio-economic structure such as widespread poverty, caste/ethnic/gender-based discrimination, political/social oppression, and corruption were exposed in open democracy and ultimately favoured the Maoists' revolt. Therefore, insurgency did not, in fact, start in 1996 in the form of the Maoists' war; it was seen from time to time in the Panchayat era, preceding the 1990' democracy. However, the grievances and deprivations of the excluded and marginalised sectors of society, including ethnic groups, were catalysed by the Maoists insurgency which extended throughout the country in a decade-long people's war.

The inability of successive governments to address the grievances and increase awareness against the bad governance at the centre, particularly after the restoration of democracy in 1990, resulting from the new debate facilitated to an extent by the free media that added to the frustrations of people on the lower rungs of the socio - economic ladder, and helped the Maoists win them over in their ideological struggle. Many parts of the state, particularly rural sectors are isolated in terms of access to decision making and resources. Neither have the people at the local level been mobilised towards democracy, nor have they been liberated from century-long exploitation, oppression and suppression. There has been no policy to distribute the resources and decision-making power of the centre towards the local people through VDCs in order to decide their own affairs and rule by themselves¹¹⁶. Distributing the economic resources to the villages from central government came into action only when the minority government of CPN UML had emerged as the largest party in the 1994 election. As a result, VDCs became more powerful through the policy of local self-government that was implemented in the 1997's local election. But the people were not mobilized enough to support the traditional liberal democracy, because strong ideological background and catalysed existing grievances of the people at the local level was used by the Maoists to prepare the war for their rule of people's democracy (*Naya Janabadi Babastha*). The parliamentary parties seemed to fail to put forward the strong and stable government in the centre due to the failure of the single party majority government of NC in 1994 and then the collapse of the UML government in 1995. Hence, the parties in the parliament launched an anti-democratic maneuver in order to make and dismiss the central cabinet. Therefore, disorder and rampant corruption emerged in the state mechanism that provoked the formation of a negative political culture and people's dissatisfaction which fertilised Maoist activities. Once again, the NC succeeded to rule the country by the majority as a result of its 1999 general election, but it could not eliminate the corruption, disorder, violence and intra and inter-party conflict. Likewise, policies that were made and operated by the government in order to resolve the Maoist war also failed to manage the conflict which had been equally increasingly extended day by day in rural parts of the country. Along

¹¹⁶ The tradition of cash grants (NRs 10000) from the central to the local government (VDCs) was begun as nominal amount of only NRs. 10,000 in 1992 by the government of Nepali Congress, which was significantly upgraded to NRs. 300, 000 in 1994 by the UML government. It has been raised to NRs. 500, 000 in 1999 and now stands at NRs. 1,000,000.

with these features of the failure of the state, the Royal massacre of King Birendra and the power games played by King Gyanendra in a coup *d'état* also ultimately favoured the Maoist War. Due to the King's direct rule and oppression of democratic parties, the traditional bipolar power centers splintered into three major power centers as the King, the Parliament and the Maoist (Baral 2004). However, the parliamentary political parties and the CPN (Maoist) came into negotiation and a 12 point negotiation that ultimately encouraged the *Janandolan-II* which emerged in the April (2006) movement. Through this, the democratic system prevailed on the one hand, and the Maoists became part of the democratic government through a comprehensive peace agreement which ended the people's war (1996 to 2006).

8.2 Maoist 'People's War' and Magar Ethnicity

The armed insurgency, which is called the People's War, was based in rural parts and settlements in the western hills of Nepal, particularly Magar villages. Maoists settled in Kham Magar dominated areas and tried to establish their base areas there in order to fight with the government. They had some support for their People's War from this community, having assured them that they will establish a political Magarant autonomous region (de Sales 2002). On the other hand, it is also said that "Maoists have cleverly exploited the ethnic issue, by standing up for ethnic rights and holding out the prospect of autonomous regions" (Gellner 2002 : 22). However, the war extensively affected the Magars, therefore, Anne De Sales points out: "there is an irony in the fact that many Magars have been killed and half of the victims have been Magars in the Maoists people's war" (2002 : 341). Indeed, an unofficial publication declares that the total casualties of Magars in the Maoist People's War in 2000 is 24.2 per cent, which is the largest number of any caste and ethnic groups in Nepal (Ekkaisau Satabdi 2000 : 26). In addition, the leader, in-charge of the Gandaki Region of Magar National Liberation Front (MNLF), describes that 'out of twelve thousand casualties during the Maoist peoples' war, around three thousand were Magars (1996-2006). Out of 3000 Magar casualties, around 150 activists were from Gandaki region and among them the large numbers were from Palpa and Myagdi districts (ShrishMagar, 2063 : 53-55). Besides these casualties, Magar people were overtly or covertly affected by the Maoist conflict.

In post 1990 democracy, the pro-Maoist parties, particularly the CPN *Masal* and *Ekata Kendra* (Unity Centre), who believed in a revolutionary war' and a slogan 'power comes through the barrel of a gun', united under the banner of the *Samyukta Jana Morcha, Nepal* (UPFN). *Masal* had a dominant role in most of the hill regions of the center west of Nepal, particularly districts like Rolpa, Rukhum, Salyan, Pyuthan, and Baglung. Due to the conflict between Maoists and the state, the NC, which ruled over the state since the first general election in 1991 and local election in 1992, mobilised the police force in these areas to suppress the Maoist activists. The Maoist party that participated in the first general election

and local election through the UPFN succeeded in mobilising the grass-roots people to favour them. Hence, it helped to build the popular leadership of the respected parties who had a very big role in the respected fields, particularly in Rolpa and Rukum districts for disseminating the Maoist ideology¹¹⁷. The history of insurgency against the despotic Rana regime can be traced back to Lakhan Thapa Magar's revolt to the Maoist revolution. Likewise, some other sacrificed their lives and while others were found deviated in the local level against the despotic ruling system in the west hill also reveal the Magar identity in politics. For instance, Kami Budha Magar from western hilly area received death penalty because he was alleged to have mobilised and organised the people against the existing authority and rulers for their despotic rule in 1955. Some Magar local leaders such as Tejendra Gharti Magar and Dhram Bahadur Rokka Magar had devoted their lives for the Magar community by utilizing the left ideology from the Panchyat to the Maoist (insurgency) era.

There is a long list of Magar activists who sacrificed their lives while organising the Magars and making them aware of any despotic authority and its suppressive policies, particularly from referendum till the beginning of the Maoist war (MNLF 2063). During the referendum period, the west Kham Magar region was the center of the left ideology. Hence, after the restoration of democracy in 1990 it has been regarded as the headquarters of the Maoists, where the local Magar activists played a significant role in mobilising and socialising the Magar people towards the Maoist ideology and Maoist war. Magar leaders, such as Barman Budha, Tej Man Gharti Magar, Lokendra Bista Magar, Tekendra Gharti Magar, Barsha Man Pun, Nanda Kishor Pun, Santos Budha Magar and other activists in the region, particularly among Magar villages, contributed significantly to the *Janayuddha* (people's war). The master minds, i.e. Puspa Kamal Dahal alias Prachanda, and Ram Bahadur Thapa Magar (Badal) engineered the Maoist insurgency on the intellectual grounds provided by Mohan Baidhya and Babu Ram Bhattarai¹¹⁸.

Undoubtedly, the well-educated cadres in accordance with the Maoist radical ideology ensured that a bed rock principle for this revolution was that 'the state authority should be gained through people's war'. The activists were trained through the Marxist, Leninist and Maoist ideology, and in Nepalese context Prachanda Path for seeking one party dictatorship holding the power over the state. Through this doctrine of political ideology, the CPN - Maoist party trained the people including Magars at the local level that they would be privileged with power and resources on behalf of their own ethnic autonomous region, only

¹¹⁷ See the case study of the Barman Budha Magar (Anna de sales, 2005).

¹¹⁸ Magars, constituting over the 7 percent of Nepali population, are the largest ethnic group in the country. And it is this very area of Magarant that is now bearing the brunt of the Maoist's peoples' war' launched by Mohan Vida aka Karan, Puspa Kamal Dahal aka Prachanda, along with Babura Bhattarai and Pampa Bhopal of the United People's Front (Shahar, 2004: 50).

when they control fully over the central authority of the state. Besides the ideological base, there were many other reasons why the war extended and disseminated rapidly through-out the country. The grievances of Dalits, ethnic groups and women, people concerning illiberal rule, bad-governance, rampant corruption, Kathmandu centralised authority and elites, authoritarian exercise by the activists and political parties, and increasing gap between the haves and the have-nots were all such factors that fuelled the Maoist war. These types of fertile ground ultimately allowed people to raise their voices, which were strategically catalysed by the Maoists in order to penetrate the war at each sector and every place at the local level. The nature of Gurilla Warfare and the Maoist ideology favoured launching the war from rural village to urban city (*Gaundekhi Shahar Gherne*). Therefore, the people from rural villages and unemployed, particularly ethnic groups and Dalits, were mobilised in the war. Among the ethnic groups, Magars played a dominating role in Maoist militias by participating in the People's Liberation Army (PLA). Two deputy commanders out of four, three division commanders out of seven, and many commanders out of the 21 battalions are from the Magar ethnic group¹¹⁹.

¹¹⁹ The information was collected through in-depth interview with Game Bahadur Shrewish, Treasurer in the Magar Liberation Front, and Coordinator of Gandaki Regional Coordination Committee of the Front (2063/9/16).

Accordingly the key characteristics of the Magars are Shojho and Bahadur (straight-forward and brave)¹²⁰. Though they are regarded as the bold and brave people, they are straightforward and they undoubtedly believe other people. Some times they may fall in the trap of the cunning people easily and may be betrayed. Therefore, according to Baral Magar¹²¹, due to these nature of Magars, they are exploited by the rulers and state in various ways since the Rajput Thakuri and Khas migrant held the authority over their territory. Magars were victimised not only in the authoritarian Panchayat or previous period but also following the restoration of democracy in 1990 due to subjugation and marginalisation of the minority and the ethnic groups in the polity. Therefore, the Maoists are well-received by the Magars for their commitment to the establishment of Magarant autonomous region, for self-rule. Hence, Bom Kumari Budha¹²² expressed her view that Magars significantly contributed to the Maoist War by being recruited in the PLA. She further stated that the People's War was successful due to the warfare skills and warrior natures of the Magars. The senior Magar activist and Maoist leader, Suresh Ale¹²³ said in his interview that the Magars and the Maoists manifestly benefit each other. Magars greatly contributed to the Maoists and their war by providing guerrillas and physical support, therefore, the Maoists war spread rapidly throughout the country. Likewise, due to influence in the Maoist's ideology and their significant presentation in the war, Magars are said to be the major underprivileged ethnic group in terms of identity and culture throughout the country and abroad.

8.3 Magars and the Maoist Politics

It has been found that most of the political parties are dominated by high caste hill groups and there are only some representations from the ethnic and other sectors of society. It has been mentioned in the previous chapter that with respect to other parties, the Maoist party is more inclusive in terms of participation of various castes and ethnic groups, including the Magars. Hence, it seems that some factors have been instrumental in shaping the Magars' role in the Maoist party. First, the Maoist war began in the Kham region in the west hills, the Athara Magarant territory. Due to the isolation of this region from the Nepali state, Magars have limited access to the state and its resources. Secondly, as dominant ideology of NCP-Mashal and NCP-Unity centre, the leftwing extremists, as the mother party of the CPN

¹²⁰ The senior Magar activist Barman Budha from Rolpa as the Magar dominated district, said in his interview that "the Dharma of the Magar is straight, not telling lie, as what we say we commit and operate in practice" (Anna de Sales, 'The Life History of Barman Budha' a paper presented in the seminar, Activism and Civil Society in South Asia, June, 24-26, Oxford).

¹²¹ An interview with Dr. Keshar Jung Baral Magar (2063/7/22).

¹²² An interview with Bom Kumari Budha Magar, an independent Magar leader from Kham region (2063/8/27).

¹²³ An interview with Suresh Ale Magar (2063/9/12).

Maoist, had shown more influence over the region. After the establishment of democracy in 1951, the Magar activists particularly belonging to the communist ideology have been found playing the oppositional role against the traditional regime. The other remaining radical groups are involved in various activities against the state in order to mobilise the people at the grass-roots level, such as peasants, workers, students and the junior staff of the government, in order to establish their particular ideology.

Since the foundation of the CPN - Maoist party in February 1995, in order to mobilise the *Janajatis* by the party ideology, its leaders have been advocating that 'ethnic rights can be acquired through fighting not by mercy'. Therefore, they preferred 'the bullet instead of the ballot'. Maoists launched the war by mobilising people, particularly the Magar farmers and Dalits from the rural areas in the west hills, against the state in order to establish a new people's democracy based on Maoism. Hence, they persuaded the discarded groups of people, like *Janajatis*, to participate in the war. Maoists strategically mobilised the underprivileged, marginalised and excluded people towards their ends with provoking their century-long grievances and dissatisfactions regarding the state. They promised that they would have ruling power and decision-making authority over their historical dominant territory. Therefore, through mobilisation of the people from excluded strata and geography, Maoists succeeded in extending their peoples' war through most of the hills and rural territories. Hence, the war was launched and significantly extended on the basis of Magars and their rural territory which was geographically favourable to the warfare (de sales 2002).

There are significant numbers of Magars in the Maoist people's liberation army. The martyrs list also shows that more Magars have sacrificed their lives for Maoist war than any other ethnic group. Both in the Maoist party structures and in PLA, the Magars are well-represented. Three Magar leaders from the Kham region have had representative roles in the central committee of the Maoist party. In addition to this, the Magar ethnic group is significantly represented in the Maoist political party relative to other parties at the local level, for instance Kaski, Myagdi and Palpa districts (see Tables 6.1 and 8.1). Likewise, the fact that Magars have two deputy-commanders out of the four in the PLA shows that this ethnic group has significantly dominated the Maoist militia. However, representation and participation do not necessarily mean that there is any significant role in the decision making process and resources of the state. Therefore, a query could be raised in this context. In addition to representation in the party and PLA, whether the Maoists want to empower the marginal groups of people including Magars in state affairs along with promoting their ethnic identity, or they have just catalysed their grievances for their power seeking mission. In this regard, the perception of Magars at the local level about the Maoist politics and war are analysed in the succeeding sections.

Maoists have extensively mobilised Magars towards their war and party politics. Moreover, Magars have the decisive role in the Maoist's militias and many Magar activists have a prominent role in disseminating Maoist politics at the local level, particularly in Magar-dominated districts and villages. Undoubtedly, the Magars have offered local leadership and have shown their warfare skills in the country and abroad. Magars have significantly succeeded in disseminating their ethnic values throughout the country and abroad and their reputation as those who have greatly contributed to the Peoples' War with their involvement in the Maoist militia. On the other hand, some Magars think that the Maoists strategically used Magars, rather than actually empowering them. A 45-year-old Magar activist in Kaski said that the Maoists had cleverly exploited the Magar sentiments in order to gain power. He further expressed his view that if the Maoists are really pleased and recognise Magar's contribution, they could have been appointed in the dignified decision making posts of the state when they ruled twice after the April 2006 revolution. Similarly, a young Magar activist in Palpa told in his interview that while some Magars from the west Kham region have been mobilised as local Maoist leaders and a few have been represented in its central body, Magars from other parts, like Barha Magarant region, have not been mobilised in this respect. His view is quite close to the views of two senior activists of Myagdi and Kaski who said that those Magars who participated in the Maoist district committees are either from the west Kham region or are newly migrated to this region. Thus, Maoists do not have a strong influence over the Magars in this region. It is because the Magars from Kham region, the Peoples' War based territory, have contributed to the *Janayuddh*, and the leaders who have been socialised through the war have the responsibility to organise and mobilise the general people in favour of the Maoist party.

On the other side it seems that the Maoist party has recruited non-Magar leaders in the Magarant autonomous region and as party heads in almost all of its district committees. Hence, it selected non-Magar candidacies in Myagdi district and other Magar dominant constituencies¹²⁴. Therefore, some activists argue that the Maoist party has also been dominated by high caste hill people and they nominated a few Magars as symbolic representatives from local and the central level in order to seek their popular support. In Kaski, an old Magar activist stated that 'the ethnic federalism which has been encouraged by the Maoists is just for fulfilling their interest in seeking power rather than in empowering deprived ethnic and other groups'. Those who oppose the Maoist politics think that Maoist party would have the dominance in this region through their ethnic wings, MNLF. Almost all ethnic wings are not free to decide their policy by themselves. Rather, they are always guided by that in-charge of the wings that are almost non-Magars and they follow party ideology rather than the ethnic interest of the Magars in general.

¹²⁴ See name list of the candidacies in the CA election, www.electioncomission.com.np

So far the ethnic demands are concerned, particularly proportional representation and ethnic federalism, the ethnic organisations have been articulating and integrating from time to time through their activism even before the beginning of the Maoist war in 1996. As mentioned in the above discussion, it seems that the Maoists have strategically used these demands into their party's favour. Maoists mobilised the ethnic and Dalit people in order to seek power and they catalysed their grievances by advocating and provoking in order to show Maoists consideration towards their century-long exploitation, oppression and deprivation. Hence, it has been a part of their basic strategy of Maoist politics in Nepal to win the downtrodden sections of Nepali society as infantry for their political ambitions (Kramer, 2005).

In a settlement of the Histan VDC, where only Magars live, the researcher came across a small group including 7 people. They expressed an interest in mission concerning their territory. He found them almost entirely positive in their beliefs towards the Maoists. They were impressed and significantly influenced by the Maoist mission. Some young people said they were very much impressed by observations of Maoist fighters. They had found almost all young Magars like them devoting their life to the Peoples' War for Maoist rule and recruitment in the PLA. Therefore, they joined the MNLF and the Maoist party. One activist voiced his opinion that, along with the Maoist rule over the country, Magarant would be given to the Magars, to rule themselves. They also stated that they found Maoists very active as they performed cultural programmes from time and again and after the programmes were over, they left the village immediately and moved to the next village. They were successful in strengthening their organisation and increase their supporters. Recently, they have appointed the local activists to the Maoist party and its people's government at the village level. Moreover, while conducting research it was found in most of the villages and hamlets of his field areas in Myagdi that Maoists tried to impress the women by launching the anti-alcohol and anti-gambling campaign.

The local Magar activists, including the teacher at the high school in the Histan village of Myagdi, told the researcher that in fact they wanted to see the Maoist government. They expected that this party could do much for development of the villages. They further stated that only the Maoist policy would have their ethnic federal state for the overall progress of the Magar people in general. Among them, some were the UML activists; they believed that the Maoists have a clear-cut vision, better than that of their own party, in order to uplift and empower the Magar people and their society. A young teacher in the Rima village of the Histan VDC of Myagdi told the researcher that he was really dissatisfied with his affiliation with the UML party because he did not find the UML party giving preferences to the basic needs of the people and the basic infrastructures of village development, but rather giving more attention to obtaining power in government. On the other hand, he believed that the

Maoists were going to empower the Magars and promote the Magar identity by providing basic needs and development through the Magarant ethnic autonomous region. Therefore, he made a prediction that the Maoists would have a good image and would rule over the state with the support of people at grass- roots including Magars in general. Similar observations were also made by those Magar activists who supported the Maoists in Myagdi, Palpa and Kaski districts.

Besides the positive arguments mentioned above, some Magars had different attitudes regarding the Maoist politics. According to them, the Maoists have just exploited the sentiments of the Magars and other excluded groups in order to gain power and control over the state. A woman activist in Tikot village of Histan-Myagdi said that in the name of social transformation, Maoists hindered and interfered in some of their jobs. The Mother-groups here have conducted some social reforms and small development works, initiated by them. The chairman of the mother group argued that the mother group stopped rampant alcoholism, gambling and other anti-social activities in the village. Moreover, the group also constructed path-way and tried to preserve the water source and forest. But they were not allowed to do these tasks independently when the Maoists entered their village. Maoists said that the village was under their control. They imposed decisions upon the villagers and local institutions, saying that all jobs and rules could be done only with their authority. Local institutions, including the Mother group, were only allowed to do their activities with the Maoists. Maoists even handled some cases of theft, gambling and alcoholism. During the anti-alcohol activism, they destroyed alcohol-making pots but kept and drank fine alcohol. Likewise, they caught the oxen of villagers and ate beef. Some of the villagers were also compelled to eat, a few among them started to eat oxen then after. After some days, the Maoist fighters left and have not again appeared in the village. However, the Mother group and other local institutions left their jobs due to the Maoist threats. Therefore, the chairman of the mothers group argued that she does not like the Maoists.

During his field study, the researcher found that the case of a Head Master's murder was more debatable in the Baranja VDC of Myagdi. Those who were not Maoists condemned the Maoists for killing the headmaster of the Baranja village. As many other villagers, the teachers believed he was innocent, but the Maoists killed him brutally and cruelly. A senior Magar women activist stated that 'the Maoists have no mercy; they killed the head master inhumanly.' This view was also held by most of those commoners who did not support the Maoists blindly. On the other side, those who strongly supported the Maoists believed that he spied on Maoist activities and informed the state personnel. Therefore, he received the death penalty for his activity against the Maoists. But a school teacher at the village, who had good relation with the head master and who also sympathised with the Maoists, said that it was not clear whether he spied or not and that even if he did so, then the death

penalty was excessive. Likewise, the former chairman of the VDC also said in his interview that the Maoists wanted to establish a one-party system which would not be possible in a plural democracy. They killed many innocent persons, demanded big donations, and inflicted mental and physical tortures on those who were not in their favour or who opposed their cruel and inhuman activities. He further stated that not allowing other ideologies than their own is fundamentally anti-democratic. The VDC chairman was also imprisoned for three weeks by the Maoists for opposing their action (see in detail: Appendix 10).

In Somadi VDC of Palpa, two activists affiliated with UML and NC respectively stated in their evaluation that the Maoists could do anything. According to them, Maoists used the young Magars by involving them to fight against the state. Magar and Dalits were exploited badly and were forced to follow the Maoist ideology and interest. They further stated that the Maoists claim themselves that they launched the war for emancipating the poor and marginalised ethnicity. However, they killed the general people and seized their property blaming them for supporting the state, which is controversial. Undoubtedly, it is nice to hear about the Magarant autonomous region for the Magars, but they doubted how it could be possible to establish distinct ethnic province for particular janajati, whereas, almost all caste and ethnic groups are in minority. Not any ethnic group homogeneously holds the majority in any particular region and have been living in village together with other ethnic and caste groups since unknown past. Likewise, an UML activist of Palpa, who was also a member of the interim parliament, stated his belief that the Maoists strategically used the grievances of excluded people, including the Magars. He further said that people's will is necessary in order to rule over the country and it should be achieved only through peaceful means, instead of spreading terror through guns and violence. He also questioned the killing of the innocent Magars in rural villages in the name of Magar empowerment. In this regard, he declared that the Maoists do not have a positive image among the Magars like him, particularly in his constituency of eastern Palpa where many Magars are settled¹²⁵. Likewise, similar type of argument was also expressed by Nar Kumari Pun Magar, a UML activist of the Myagdi. She said with the researcher that "if the Maoists really recognise the Magars contribution in their mission and want to empower them, why do they kill or torture the innocent Magars?"¹²⁶ She thought that 'Maoists are extending their party activities through violence and terror rather than holding the will of the general people through peaceful means so that people support them due to the threat of gun and their action. Some activists in Kaski did not want to talk about Maoists because of fear from them. Likewise, some other argued that they did not believe the Maoist's mission for seeking one party dictatorship. He believed that different political parties flourish and enjoy privileges in a democracy.

¹²⁵ An interview with Bhadra Bahadur Thapa Magar, Palpa (2063/9/7)

¹²⁶ An interview with Nar Kumari Pun Magar, Myagdi (2063/5/26)

Through the discussion above, two conclusions can be drawn: support or opposition to the Maoist politics. Undoubtedly, some activists and ordinary Magars in the villages are positively influenced by the Maoists' activities and policy of Magar empowerment. They supported the Maoists for their encouragement to liberate the exploited, oppressed, deprived people. In some of the villages where the state army operated in the name for oppressing the Maoist, people became supporters of the Maoists due to the horror and cruel acts of the state personnel. Those Magars who were affiliated with the Maoist party and the MNLF praised their commitment to search a new people's democracy. Almost all believed that with Maoist rule over the country, the deprived and oppressed people, including Magars, will be privileged and empowered. Therefore, they hoped that the Maoists' mission to seize state authority would succeed and they fully expected to see Maoist rule in the state soon. On the other side, some commoners did not believe the Maoists due to their brutality towards ordinary people and their irrational so-called *janakarbhai* to those who opposed or criticised them. Moreover, some activists affiliated with other parties other than Maoists thought that the Maoists have strategically used the Magars to seek power for their own end. They believed, neither the Magarant ethnic state with a right to self-determination is possible in the heterogeneous Nepali society, nor the Magars will benefit in the Maoists party. They perceive that Magars are straight forward and they immediately believe in people and therefore, they have been exploiting since history.

8.4 Magars' Perception on the Maoist War

The research was conducted in six rural villages and three urban centres of the Western Region. Among these areas, Baranja village of Myagdi followed by Somadi (Bhagani) village of Palpa, were the most victimized during the Maoists conflict than other places of the study. There were also a few incidents in Histan village, but the rest of the areas were not significantly affected during the conflict. The Maoists carried out massive attack in the headquarters of both districts in 2004. But they could not hold the district headquarters for a full day and the state was able to hold its power. But the Maoists destroyed most of the government offices and the researcher saw some of the scenes while he was in the field. Besides these major incidents, some other cross-firings and casualties had occurred in some other villages during the fight between the Maoists and the state army. Those affected by the conflict spread word of their victimizations and, in the process reports were greatly exaggerated. Therefore, these pictures created fear among the ordinary people. Then they calculate knowingly and unknowingly that some sort of place is dangerous in terms of conflict and violence. By such process people in general were greatly terrified with the Maoist war. Such experiences were also heard in pre field work on Baranja and Somadi.

The case study has already mentioned the story of Baranja, but as for Somadi, people declared that it was badly affected during the Maoist conflict. People said that the place was

very dangerous and that the researcher might not be allowed to go and to do his research work. It was supposedly one of the forts of the Maoists where they had their own radio station. Therefore, some Magar activists in Pokhara and Tansen advised him not to go to this village. Since it was the most dangerous village out of the 67 total villages of the Palpa district, the researcher became very eager to go to the area and to get first hand experience. When he went to Somadi, however, he did not get any terrifying atmosphere that he had heard of before going to the village. There was one major incident in which the Nepali Army shot dead 6 Maoist activists in a home of the Bhagani of Somadi VDC, which is close to Shiddheshwar VDC. This VDC, which has been always Magar-dominated, is very far from Tansen, the district headquarters of Palpa. The researcher went to Bhagani and met the owner of the house, where the incident had occurred and who was also victimised by the Nepali Army. According to Shyam Darlimi, he was tortured and beaten very badly but his life was saved with the support of the local leaders of the Nepali Congress and the UML. They gave statements in his favour, saying that he was not a Maoist. He told the researcher that his daughter had joined the PLA, and through her influences he became a Maoist. Previously, he was affiliated with UML and then the NC. The researcher was worried when he did not support him at first and was found reluctant to assist in the research work. But later he realised what he had done and allowed the researcher to go ahead for his field work. This village has a connection with the remote corner, far from the centre of Somadi, so that many people from the same VDC never visited this place. Bhagani, as the Magar-dominated village, is actually very close to the next VDC called Shidheshwar, where most of the people are Magars and supposedly had the Maoists under their control. The local activists told the researcher that a leader of NC in Palpa who was also a member of HoR at that time moved to this village from Shidheshwar to Somadi in order to gain political benefit. However, the situation there was turning into peaceful environment when the researcher was there in October, 2006.

8.4.1 Information about the Maoist People's War

The Maoist war that was conducted in between 1996 to 2006 has been a major issue in Nepalese politics. Though it emerged in the west Kham Magar territory, the war expanded to most of the rural parts of Nepal. Therefore, it is believed that almost all people at the local level have the knowledge about the Maoist war. The following table deals about the knowledge of the Magars towards the Maoist war.

Table No. 8.1
Have you heard about the Maoist People's war?

District	Voters			Activists	Frequency		
	Yes	No	Total	Yes	Yes	No	Total

Kaski	87 87.0%	13 13.0%	100 100.0%	25 100.0%	112 89.6%	13 10.4%	125 100.0%
Myagdi	94 94.0%	6 6.0%	100 100.0%	25 100.0%	119 95.2%	6 4.8%	125 100.0%
Palpa	94 94.0%	6 6.0%	100 100.0%	25 100.0%	119 95.2%	6 4.8%	125 100.0%
Total	275 91.7%	25 8.3%	300 100.0%	75 100.0%	350 93.3%	25 6.7%	375 100.0%

Source: Field Survey, 2006.

According to table no. 8.1, 350 (93.3%) out of a total of 375 respondents knew about the Maoist War, but only 25 (6.7%) stated that they had no idea on the matter. It seems that among these, some were really ignorant about the war and some of them did not want to say anything about it. Out of the 25 respondents, 52 percent are from Kaski where the effect of the Maoist conflict was relatively less severe than Myagdi and Palpa. According to the above table, among the 350 respondents who have the knowledge about this conflict; i.e. 100% activists are well-informed, followed by 91.7 percent commoners. Only 8.3 percent of the general voters seem to have no idea about the Maoist conflict. Relatively, people from activist background rather than non-activist, urban rather than rural, educated rather than non-educated, young rather than older are found to be well-informed about the Maoist War (see in Appendix: 8). Out of the total 300 voters, only 25 respondents told that they knew nothing about the war. Similarly, two respondents from Histan VDC of Myagdi and Pipal Danda of Palpa respectively said that they had never heard about the Maoist War. Likewise, almost all the respondents, who stated their ignorance about the war from Kaski followed by Palpa and Myagdi districts and claimed not to have heard about the War, in reality did not want to talk about it. In Nirmal Pokhari of Kaski, a well-known NC activist said that the war was not favourable and it has brought crises to the lives of ordinary people. Therefore, he argued that it should be forgotten. It seems that some of those who claimed ignorance of the conflict were either motivated by possible threats from the side of conflict or underestimated the Maoist War.

8.4.2 Causes of the Maoist People's War

The Maoist War directly and indirectly affected the life of the state and its people. There were many reasons behind launching Maoist insurgency and getting its shape throughout the country. A woman activist from a rural village in the Kaski district stated in her interview that those who were unemployed were recruited in the Maoist militia for getting job and money. A 50 year-old political activist in Myagdi, stated in his interview that due to the exclusionary nature of the state most of the Magars are marginalised and unemployed.

Therefore, they were involved in the fight because they were recruited in the militia. He further stated that in their adolescence, it was easy to mobilize Magars towards fighting and they enjoyed playing with guns and war. Likewise, a 45 year-old activist of the Janamukti party in Tansen, the district headquarter of Palpa, said that the exclusionary character of the state and bad governance were the major causes for the spread of war. However, in this regard, Magars think that the war occurred mainly due to unemployment and poverty, corruption and bad governance, and the exclusionary nature of the state. The following table depicts the causes of the Maoist People's war.

Table No. 8.2

In your opinion what are the Reasons behind the Maoist's war?

Causes of the Maoists' War	Voters				Activists			
	Kaski	Myagdi	Palpa	Total	Kaski	Myagdi	Palpa	Total
Unemployment and Poverty	66 66.0%	68 68.7%	66 66.7%	200 67.1%	21 84.0%	13 52.0%	15 60.0%	49 65.3%
Corruption and miss-governance	46 46.0%	29 29.3%	51 51.5%	126 42.3%	16 64.0%	16 64.0%	19 76.0%	51 68.0%
Government's suppression	5 5.0%	22 22.2%	20 20.2%	47 15.8%	3 12.0%	9 36.0%	6 24.0%	18 24.0%
Exclusionary state	44 44.0%	54 54.5%	44 44.4%	142 47.6%	13 52.0%	20 80.0%	18 72.0%	51 68.0%
Maoist's desire for power	34 34.0%	32 2.3%	11 1.1%	77 25.8%	10 40.0%	10 40.0%	8 32.0%	28 37.3%
Murder of King Birendra	5 5.0%	7 7.1%	3 3.0%	15 5.0%	3 12.0%	2 8.0%	4 16.0%	9 12.0%
Do not know	24 24.0%	11 11.1%	17 7.2%	52 17.4%				
Total	100 224.0%	99 225.2%	99 204.1%	298 221.0%	25 264.0%	25 280.0%	25 280.0%	75 274.6%

Percent based on Multiple Responses

Source: Field Survey, 2006

As per table no. 8.2, majority of Magar voters (67%) believe unemployment and poverty are the main causes of the Maoist war. According to them, the young generation of Magars, particularly who were unemployed and had poor economic background had been involved in the war for two basic reasons. First, they found a job and when they were recruited in the

PLA and the militia force. Second, most of them were orientated by the Maoist politics with the advent of insurgency and belief that they would be privileged under the Magarant autonomous region after the *Janayuddha*. On the other hand, according to table no. 8.2, activists seem more in favour of the argument that the exclusionary state, corruption and bad governance are the basic causes of the war. Most of the activists (68 percent) from different places of Kaski, Myagdi and Palpa districts are of the view that Magars are excluded and marginalised in state affairs. That is why many Magars were involved in the Maoist war or politics, believing that it will empower, and gain access and influence in the affairs and resources of the state. Similarly, 68 percent of the activists believe that corruption and bad-governance that flourished during the parties' governments following the political change in 1990 are also major causes of expansion of the Maoist war. Likewise, more than 65 percent of the activists express that unemployment and poverty were also the factors for spreading the Maoist war at the grass-roots level.

As depicted by the above table, 37.3 percent of the activists followed by 26 percent of voters perceive that the Maoist's desire for power was one of the main reasons behind the Maoist conflict. Likewise, some Magars (24 percent of the activists and 16 percent of the voters) state that government suppression was also the case for spreading the Maoist war. Respondents from Myagdi and Palpa, where the people were more affected by the conflict rather than in Kaski, emphasised more about the suppression of the government. Likewise, more than 37 percent of the activists followed by around 26 percent of the voters believe that the Maoist war was conducted to seek state power. Most of the activists expressed their view in interviews with researcher that along with war strategy the Maoists want to acquire more control over the state authority by exerting strong influence over more and more people and territory.

The above mentioned table no. 8.2 also states that 5 percent of the voters followed by 12 percent of the activists argue that the assassination of King Birendra and his kin was also a cause for extending the Maoist war extensively at a grass-root level. Most of the respondents who supported this statement said that if the King was not safe, and if the Nepali Army could not save him, then no one could be safe in the country. It was also a new agenda for increasing Maoist values, as well as disseminating the anti-monarchial and anti-NR sentiment among the people in general. Even those, who supported King Birendra and the monarchial system, said that after the royal massacre, the popularity of the Kingship became weak and the war had disseminated with anti-monarchial sentiment in favour of the Maoists. The Chairman of the NMA-Kaski, Myagdi and Palpa unanimously argued in their interviews that the royal massacre was the major factor in disseminating the anti-monarchial phenomenon at the grass-root level. Therefore, after the success of the *janandolan-II*,

monarchy faced the deepest crisis in its history and ultimately collapsed¹²⁷. On the other hand, out of the 298 voters, more than 17 percent responded that they had no idea in this regard. However, the cross tabulation analyses show that the activists, relatively the young, well-educated, and urban respondents placed the emphasis on unemployment and poverty as the major causes of the People's War, in comparison to the respondents from non-activist, old age, low-educated, rural parts (see the Appendix: 8). Likewise, the respondents from Myagdi and Palpa rather than Kaski where, during the war, the Maoist conflicts were extreme, have significantly pointed out that the government suppressions also caused the spread of the Maoist's war in many rural parts¹²⁸.

The researcher had an interesting experience while talking about the Maoist war to a young Magar boy in a rural village of Kaski. His old and blind father, who was listening quietly to our talk, asked the researcher whether he believed or not in the Maoist mission. The researcher responded that he was an independent researcher and he was here to collect their arguments and views for writing a thesis. Then the person asked whether it would be exposed publicly or not. When researcher said it would be kept secret and used only for writing a thesis without mentioning the name of any respondent, then he expressed his view that the Maoists had launched the war purely to rule over the country. He further forecasted that the Maoists would not fully succeed in controlling the country. Therefore, if they got opportunity to share power in the central authority, then they would abandon their so-called people's war. He concluded by saying that due to our social culture, nothing would be significantly changed in favour of the people in general, even if the Maoist ruled over the country. To the researcher's query as to how he could forecast such things he replied "Although I can not see, I listen well". He used to listen to the radio for acquainting the news of state and he said that he is worried about violence and conflict due to the Maoists. He knew some of the Maoists in his locality and sometimes he had the opportunity to listen to their talks. According to him, most of them talked about how to collect more and more money and how to use action to those who denied to give the donation or who might be against their mission. It is more or less found in reality that Maoists are not ruling the country in order to do better for nation and people rather they are concerned more about how to control fully by their party over the state and its authority.

¹²⁷ They expressed their views in different interviews that if there had been no royal massacre then Gyanendra could not have become King and would never have to go against democracy. They thought that if King Birendra were to be present, the anti-monarchical sentiments would not have emerged. Therefore, monarchy and democracy could potentially cooperate in Nepal.

¹²⁸ The wars were conducted in both districts' headquarters launched by the Maoist people's army where many security personnel from both sides were killed and millions of properties were destroyed.

8.4.3 The Resolution of the Maoist War

The violence occurred to a great extent in Nepal as a result of the conflict between the Maoists and the State. Because of the Maoists conflict, the life of the people was very uncomfortable. In many rural parts, where the conflict was extreme, people felt insecure and were confined in their houses. They feared to communicate what they saw or heard. Moreover, some told the researcher that at that time nobody knew when and where one would be threatened and tortured and sometimes the life might be in crises from the Maoist or state. In such a definitive atmosphere, people in general wanted peace and tranquility, along with the resolution of the Maoist conflict. Therefore, hoping for an overall solution to the political conflict, Nepali people have extensively participated in the democratic movement which is known as the April (2006) Revolution. However, Magars from the west hills expressed their views differently on the resolution of the Maoist conflict through surveys and interviews. Some data mentioned in this research might be irrelevant in contemporary politics, because the field study was conducted, particularly after succeeding *janandolan-II* and pre- peace pact held between Maoists and state. Although, the respondents and interviewers expressed different views on the Maoists' war and Maoist politics, their views more or less resemble in practice. However, following table discusses the Magars' view on how to resolve the Maoist conflict.

Table No. 8.3

How the Maoist conflict can be resolved?

Means for Resolve	Voters				Activists			
	Kaski	Myagdi	Palpa	Total	Kaski	Myagdi	Palpa	Total
Peace negotiation	30 30.0%	30 30.3%	45 45.5%	105 35.2%	9 36.0%	12 48.0%	8 32.0%	29 38.7%
Employment and proportional development	48 48.0%	42 42.4%	44 44.4%	134 45.0%	9 36.0%	13 52.0%	16 64.0%	38 50.7%
Coalition goes. including Maoist	68 68.0%	65 65.7%	41 41.4%	174 58.4%	18 72.0%	14 56.0%	15 60.0%	47 62.7%
Election for CA	24 24.0%	24 24.2%	8 8.1%	56 18.8%	9 36.0%	12 48.0%	9 36.0%	30 40.0%
Proportional Reps. and inclusion state	28 28.0%	35 35.3%	44 44.4%	107 35.9%	16 64.0%	14 56.0%	15 60.0%	45 60.0%
Republic state	6	13	5	24	2	6	3	11

	6.0%	13.1%	5.0%	8.0%	8.0%	24.0	12.0%	14.7%
Do not know	25 25.0%	14 14.1%	17 17.2%	56 18.8%				
Total	100	99	99	298	25	25	25	75
Percent	229.0%	225.0%	206.0%	220.1%	252.0%	284.0%	264.0%	266.8%

Percent Based on Multiple Responses

Source: Field Survey, 2006.

The above table shows that 100 percent of the activists, followed by 81.2 percent of the voters, argued their views on the means to resolve the War, whereas, 18.8 percent of the voter responded that either they did not like to say or that they had no idea regarding the issue. Out of the 375 total respondents, the majority of the voters (58.4 percent) and the activists (60.7 percent) think that a coalition government including the Maoists would be the best way for resolving the conflict. Beyond this, 45 percent of the voters give a high priority to employment and proportional development, followed by 50.7 percent of the activists. Likewise, 60 percent of the activists and 36 percent of the voters like to stress proportional system and inclusive democracy which is the best means for resolving the Maoist war. In addition to these, over 35 percent of the non-activists and around 39 percent of the activists both prefer a peace negotiation as the best means for resolving the conflict. Through a comprehensive peace agreement, signed after the democratic mass movement of 2006, the Maoists became a part of the formal government and the war was brought to an end. Likewise, the above table no. 8.3 reveals that 40 percent of the activists followed by around 19 percent of the voters believed that an election for the constituent assembly should be held as the Maoists had been demanding it for a long time as a permanent resolution to the conflict. Some others, around 15 percent of the activists and 8 percent of general Magars think that if Nepal was declared a Republic state then the Maoist conflict would be resolved.

Magars at the local level believe that the Maoist war took place in many rural parts because of the unemployment and poverty that is commonly found in these areas. Hence, the exclusionary nature of the state was also a major factor in mobilising Magars and other under-privileged groups in the Maoist insurgency. In addition, there were many other reasons why the Maoists succeeded in their politics, along with mobilisation of the people at the grass-root level. The existing political environment created an atmosphere which manifestly and latently favoured the Maoists' desire to rule over the country. This is in fact the ultimate goal of the Maoist party. Therefore, most of the respondents argued that a coalition government including the Maoists was the major means of resolving a conflict which has infected the country for the last 12 years. However, this output may be the lessons for all mainstream political parties through which they have to rule jointly for peace, development and prosperity in the country. To some extent, political parties have

implemented the views expressed by Magar respondents at the grass-roots level in the interim period, April revolution and the comprehensive peace accord held between the government and the Maoists in May, 2006. In addition to this, the respondents emphasised employment and proportional development on the one hand and proportional representation and inclusion on the other. These counteracting means of resolution are the basic factors that assist in reducing the grievances of the people and the discriminatory and exclusionary nature of the state.

The Maoist war began by following a strong revolutionary ideology for ruling over the country through one party dictatorship. The war rapidly extended throughout the country due to cooperation of the marginalized and excluded people hoping emancipation from their grievances. Hence, the ethnic people like Magars significantly contributed to the insurgency, because the Maoist had promised them more political role in the state affairs. Therefore, almost all activists express their views through their interviews that if the excluded and unprivileged groups like Magar could not be represented in the state resources and decision-making bodies in proportion to their strength of the population, then the conflict would never end. These beliefs were substantively found among Magars at a local level, however, these are the contemporary trends seen in the national agendas in ethnic politics of Nepal.

8.5 Conclusion

CPN-Maoist is one of major political parties which believe in the ideologies of Marxism, Leninism and Maoism. This party initiated the People's War in February-1996 in order to rule the country on the ground of its basic philosophy - 'proletarian dictatorship'. Although the state discarded the close system and entered into open democracy in 1990, the parliamentary parties which had been ruling the state since that time could not fulfill the demands and aspirations of the people on the one hand and could not manage bad-governance and corruption on the other. Hence, due to the exclusionary nature of the state, people like ethnic, Dalits, women and some small political parties, have been marginalised in the state polity. On these grounds, Maoists began the armed insurgency by utilizing the grievances of the people from marginal strata and regions. After two years of insurgency, the Maoists have strategically established various ethnic wings including MNLF for mobilising the ethnic population towards Maoist politics. Likewise, Magars, particularly from the west hills, have significantly contributed to the Maoist war particularly through membership in the MNLF and PLA.

Although major part of the field study of this research was conducted in pre and post April revolution and the comprehensive peace agreement was held, almost all political phenomena occurred in accordance with the views and expectations of Magars as delivered through their interviews and survey. Most of the Magars perceived that the power seeking

mission as per their ideological ground was the main mission of the Maoist war. Besides this, unemployment and poverty including marginalised and disadvantaged condition of the Dalit and ethnic people were the factors that help to spread the war throughout the country. Therefore, almost all believed that without giving reasonable space in the state authority to them the Maoist conflict could not be resolved. Likewise, to manage the conflict for ever the discriminatory and exclusionary nature of the state should be changed into inclusion of the disadvantaged and marginalised group of the people and state efforts to be centered on the economic development of the people at the grass roots level. After the peace accord, a coalition government including Maoists was formed in order to resolve the conflict and hold the CA election. Similarly, the PR system and inclusive democracy followed by the employment and proportional development seem to be the major demands of identity politics from the Magars and ethnic activism. Through the comprehensive peace accord and CA election, Maoists became the major part of the formal authority of the Nepali state. Therefore, Maoists have to be more responsible in order to implement the comprehensive peace agreement and provide access to Magars in power and resources of the state. These means of resolution undoubtedly seem to be the basic grounds for negotiation between state and ethnic forces, along with reducing the grievances of the people, and the discriminatory and exclusionary nature of the state.

Magars in the villages are strongly influenced by Maoists activities and policies for their empowerment. Some people support and are affiliated with the Maoists, hoping that the Maoists' efforts are directed towards alleviating their poverty along with providing basic needs. Some others believe that Maoists will develop the country and society if they rule over the state. In the villages where the state army conducted operations with horrible cruelty against the Maoists and villagers, some of the people became supporters of the Maoists. Hence, some Magars at the local level have been oriented through the Maoists ideology assuring that poverty, unemployment and centralised authority will be discarded in a people's democracy which will happen only when the Maoists take over state power. Moreover, those Magars who have been politically educated through the MNLF claim that they will have ruling power in their own ethnic Magarant territory and along with empowerment and good access to resources and power of the state. They hoped that it is the only way for a prosperous and progressive Magar culture and society. Therefore, they hope that the Maoist mission succeeds in order to achieve an ethnic autonomous region for the Magars. On the other hand, some commoners do not believe the Maoists due to their brutality towards ordinary people and their irrational so-called *janakarbhai* over those who either oppose or criticise them whether by policy or by their behaviour. Some Magar activists perceive that the Maoists do not in practice support the empowerment of Magars in state affairs. On the contrary, only through slogans they have exploited the sentiment in order to mobilise the Magars towards Maoist own power seeking ends. Likewise, those

activists who are affiliated with other parties rather than the Maoists believed neither the Magarant ethnic state would be possible in the heterogeneous society of Nepal nor the Magars would be privileged through the Maoist party in practice. Therefore, such people believed that the Magar and other ethnic minority will be privileged if there is consensus among the major political parties for making affirmative actions and providing ethnic and political rights with promoting their ethnic identity. On the other side, due to the mobilisation of Magars at the grass-roots level by the Maoists and MNLF through peaceful means, particularly since the peace process, the Magar in general expect that the Maoists can solve the ethnic and other problems of the state. Therefore, Magars seem increasingly supportive of the Maoist party for their slogans such as 'ethnic people should be emancipated from their centuries-long exploitation, suppression and deprivation'. All marginalised people, including Magars, will be empowered politically through gaining access to the decision making process and resources by ruling themselves in their own ethnic territory, along with the fusion of class liberation with ethnic liberation. However, it seems that some factors are crucial in order to integrate Magar demands with Maoist politics. First, some are ideologically Maoists by the socialisation in the course of insurgency and then after through participating in the activities and programmes of this party and MNLF. Second, some dissatisfied and underprivileged activists of various political parties are attracted in the Maoist party for countering leaders of their earlier parties and to get personal benefits. A few of them have succeeded to hold leadership position in the Maoist institutions and public post of the state. Third, some others support the Maoist due to economic and psychological coercion exerted by its activists at the local level. Nevertheless, the Maoist party and MNLF appear as the liberators for some Magars at the grass roots level hoping that these are the better means of development in their backward society and worse life.

CHAPTER IX

MAGARS' PERCEPTIONS ON STATE RESTRUCTURING AND FEDERALISM

9.1 The Agenda of State Restructuring, Federalism and Inclusive Democracy

Since the establishment of the NEFIN and NMA, particularly in post April (2006) revolution, these ethnic institutions have been voicing their demands for state restructuring in order to seek the political empowerment of ethnic groups, including the Magar population. Their major demands are: proportional representation in accordance with the population of each caste and ethnic group; reasonable representation in state organs; and ethnic federal autonomy with right to self-determination. Likewise, NMA has put forward its five basic principles, i.e. pluralism, secularism, human rights, devolution of power, and inclusiveness in terms of state restructuring and federalism¹²⁹. However, what is still in debate is how to redistribute power and resources in order to restructure the state doing away with the centralised authority. Two models are being considered for distribution of power and resources at the local level namely, federalism and decentralisation. In the aftermath of 1990, political parties like Janamukti party, Sadbhavana party and ethnic organisations have been found advocating the ethnic and linguistic divisions of the state into various federal provinces (Baral, 2008). This sort of idea has been gaining new height since the CPN-Maoist's War and their demands for the state to be divided into autonomous federal republic states with the right to self-determination on the grounds of ethnicity and regionalism. In this policy, Maoists have suggested seven ethnic autonomies regions i.e., *Magarant*, *Tharuwan*, *Tamuwan*, *Tamsaling*, *Newa*, *Madhes* and *Kirant* and two less developed regions *Bheri-Karnali* and *Seti-Mahakali*. During the CA election, the Maoist party has proposed eleven ethnic federal republic states, revising its earlier concept by adding more units - *Limbuwan* and *Kochila*. Three more sub-states have been proposed within *Madhes* viz. *Mithila*, *Bhojpura* and *Awadh*¹³⁰. Hence, proposing the ethnic federal units is prone to unrest. It is because, recently the Sherpa and Jadan states in the north are also

¹²⁹ The concept paper of the Nepal Magar Association for the discussion on '*Federal restructure of the state and Magarant Autonomy*', Kathmandu, 2064/9/8; and also, *Suggestions Document of NMA to the Magar members of Constituent Assembly*, 2065/2/11 (both in Nepali).

¹³⁰ CPN-Maoist, *Pratibaddhata-Patra* (Document of Commitments - Election Manifesto) for the Constituent Assembly Election, 2063VS, Kathmandu: Central Committee, CPN (Maoist).

proposed by the Maoist party. Therefore, the ethnic minority like the Chepangs also claimed the Chepang state for its own territory. However, in the western hills, two ethnic autonomies *Tamuwan* and *Magarant* are granted and these have partially been executed under the Maoists party since the conflict era. Likewise, since its establishment, the Magar National Liberation Front (MNLF), is one of the prominent ethnic wings of the Maoist party. It has been spreading among the Magar people with the demand for *Magarant* federal autonomy as per its party line¹³¹. Likewise, besides the Maoist, janajati representations in CA through major political parties, the UML and the NC, are also in favour of ethnic federalism including Magarant, though it has been debated in intra party and inter party circles as to whether ethnic federalism or regional federalism is better in the Nepalese context.

The next model for state restructuring is decentralisation, which two main political parties; Nepali Congress (NC) and United Marxist-Leninist (UML) argued and practiced during the 1990s elections. Local self-governments, as political and developmental units, have been established under the concept of the devolution of power, as mentioned by the Local-Self Governance Act, (1997) 1999 for the mobilisation of grass-root people through local governance. The National People's Front (NPF- *Janamorchha*-Nepal), the left party with Maoists approach, is still putting forward its activism in favour of effective decentralisation. Although the NPF for the last few years has been strongly campaigning against federalism advocating that this is a process of disintegration and fragmentation of the Nepalese sovereignty, the demands from overall sectors are pressurising the state to move towards a federal structure. The NC and UML had not publicly stated their latest positions in pre-phenomenon of *janajati* and *Madhesi* movement, but during and post movement they supported federalism as the major agenda for the restructure of Nepali state. Ultimately, through the interim constitution-2007, all major parties including the Maoists, NC and UML and other political parties have accepted federalism. Therefore, it seems that the overall ecology favours federal structure which is an unavoidable phenomenon of contemporary Nepalese politics. But besides the Maoists, no political party has manifestly given its views on state restructuring and federalism. However, most of the political parties including the Maoists, and ethnic organisations are in favour of allocating all power and resources to the federal governments except currency, the national economy, foreign policy, huge developmental projects and national security which will remain under the jurisdiction

¹³¹ The Report passed from the Magar National Liberation Front, Nepal, 2063; and *Magarant*.2063BS. A Mouthpiece of Magar National Liberation Front, Y. 1, No. 1, 2063 VS. Pokhara: Central Committee, MNLF (both in Nepali)

of the central state. Hence, a debate is taking place among the political parties, civil society and ethnic organisations on the issue of whether ethnicity is the only basis of federalism or history, demography, geography, culture and means of economic resources are also determining factors. However, federalism prevails in the contemporary politics of Nepal, with the belief that it is the resolution of all types of grievances and conflicts and this can not be left pending. Hence, Hachhethu says:

“It obviously involves a rejection of some historically inherent characteristics (built in from the time of unification of the country in 1768) of the Nepali state viz., monarchical rule, Hindu state, unitary form of government, primacy of one language, domination of hill Brahmins, Chhetris and Newars, centrality of Kathmandu, centralized administration, feudalism and patron-client based authoritarian administration” (2006 : 121).

However, the State Restructuring Committee (SRC) has recently forwarded the proposal of 14 ethnic provinces as the decision taken by its majority. Six geographical provinces were there as the alternative model favoured by minority of the SRC. Similarly, at the same time dissatisfied voices regarding ethnic federalism are heard in each political parties. This has happened due to the fact that adequate discussions have not been seriously conducted among parties and inter-party members. Therefore, it is lacking common consensus between and within the political parties and ethnic organisations regarding the structure, either of federal autonomy, or ethnic autonomy. Likewise, no political party presented its vision on federalism as to whether there will be dominant rule of a distinct ethnic group or not. They have not presented any vision as to whether power and authority will be distributed among several other groups. Hence, how far an ethnic unit or province can use its autonomy and ethnic rights, since the federal autonomy will secede by using the rights to self-determination is still in a controversial state. In the case of MNLF, which is disseminating its ideology in rural Magar settlements in order to seek/practice a *Magarant* state, it might be active in areas under Maoist influence. But on the other hand, it may be difficult to control and influence any ethnic group or territory since the Maoists are becoming one of the mainstream political parties of the formal Nepali government, within a multiparty democracy based on varying ideologies and political forces. Federalism is put forward as the major agenda of state restructuring in order to empower ethnic and other marginal people by the process of inclusive democracy. There are basically two major versions found in this regards; federalism based on the geographical autonomy and federalism based on ethnic autonomy.

9.2 Magars' Attitudes on State Restructuring and Federalism

Nepal is now turning to the agenda of state restructuring through CA in order to include ethnic minorities and geographically isolated groups in day to day democracy. Therefore, ethnic groups including Magars at the local level expect that they will be privileged in every walk of life if the state power and resources are distributed reasonably and rationally through restructuring of the state and federalism. Hence, most of the activists hope that the new constitution which is going to be made by the CA members will be a dignified document that may prove it to be an effective means to manage ethnic conflict and other political problems.

A majority of Magar activists expressed through their interviews with the researcher that the state should be restructured to empower Magars. A well known native Magar expert¹³² stated that “through the restructuring of the state and federalism the power and resources of the centre can be distributed at a local level. But there should be implementation of the PR system at both levels- central and federal- in order to include Magars and other groups in different institutions of the state”. Some activists perceived that ‘Magars have been marginalised in the polity of the state, hence, along with other ethnic dissatisfactions; Magars’ grievances towards the state sprang up with the Maoist insurgency. It is believed that the Magars are a subordinate and underprivileged ethnic group. They believed that inclusive democracy is essential for their representation in the political, economic, social and cultural sectors. Likewise, according to them, the state should be restructured through federalism as the best means of inclusion for empowering the excluded and marginal groups of the population. They put forward the views that federalism itself is not only the means of resolving the ethnic conflict. Moreover, it is the way of democratic means through which people at local level would be privileged with the decision making power in their matters. Some other local activists believed that democracy would be successful when each group of people will have the right to representation in such political entity. Therefore, they suggested that the state mechanism and its organs including federal units should be inclusive, particularly through the provision of representation in proportion to the strength of the population of each caste and ethnic group. By the process of state restructuring, they further stated that federalism with proportional system and autonomous local government are the two basic institutions needed to

¹³² An interview with Keshar Jung Baral Magar, 2063/8/2.

empower the marginal and excluded groups¹³³. Hence, a senior Magar activist stated that this represents the reasonable and just-full resolution of ethnic conflicts and the political problems of the people from minorities and marginal territories¹³⁴. It is an interesting thing that the Magar activists, particularly from the heterogeneous rural villages, expressed their view that the local people in the villages, irrespective of caste or ethnicity, will benefit from full local autonomy with resources. Hence, they said that it should be mentioned in the new constitution along with the effective provision for representation of minorities and marginal groups of people in the local government¹³⁵. Through strong local governance, which has full control over decision-making and resources, the local people will participate in local affairs. Undoubtedly, such governance becomes effective by the participation of people at the grass-root level. According to their past experiences, the local activists from rural villages argued that even though there were limited jurisdictions through local self-governance following the 1997 local election, the people at the local level wanted to get the information about the budget allocation and its expenditures. Only with the help of such clear information, they could assess themselves whether the decisions made by the local authority was fair or not¹³⁶. The people of the local level have a close observation over the activities that are being carried out by the local authority. Therefore, they believe that state restructuring is vital for strong and inclusive local governance and should be included in the new constitution, through which the power, authority and resources will devolve to local units of government. Moreover, people from various castes and ethnic groups will participate in local politics in line with their ethnic identity.

On the other hand, it was found that some Magar leaders believed that without federalism and ethnic autonomy, no Magars would be privileged. They also stated that the existing structure of the state was inappropriate for the inclusion of the various marginal ethnic and minority groups in the polity with their identities.

¹³³ Interviews with Krishna Bahadur Thapa Magar-2063/10/7, Dambar Purja-2063/4/23, and Bal Bahadur Rana-2063/7/17. They are the chairman of NMA in Kaski, Myagdi and Palpa district respectively.

¹³⁴ Surendra Thapa Magar, General Secretary of the Nepal Democratic Magar Association, interview in 2063/7/13; Om Paija, a executive member in central committee of the People Liberation Party-Nepal, 2063/6/25VS and Top Aslami, secretary of the People Liberation Party and Adibais-Janajati Mahasan-Palpa Jilla, 2063/7/20.

¹³⁵ Interviewees are Lal Bahadur Pun of the Baranja –Myagdi (2063/9/9), Jhak Bahadur Thapa Magar of the Tolka, Lumle –Kaski (2063/4/12), Padam Budha of the Bharle, Somadi-Palpa (2063/6/20).

¹³⁶ According to Jhak Bahadur Thapa Magar, the Ward chairman (Ward no. 4) of the Lumle VDC, the activities and decisions are manifestly of concern to the villagers as they easily and regularly are in touch with the local institution of the government body. He further said that through the active participation of the people at the grass roots ultimately makes the governance more responsible and transparent.

Therefore, Magars should have the ruling power in their historical ethnic territory along with federalism through the restructuring of the state¹³⁷. Likewise, those activists who are affiliated with the Maoist party and MNLF strongly advocate federalism based on ethnic identity, like Magar ethnic autonomy for Magars. In addition to this, the young activists who are associated with Magar organisations particularly in the urban region have been calling for Magarant autonomous region¹³⁸. Besides some Magar dominated settlements, Magars in rural parts, irrespective of any ethnic agenda, want more control over decision-making and resources in their local villages¹³⁹ through which they confidently believe that the villages will be developed with the mobilisation of central funds and local resources. Regarding the restructuring of the state, two approaches are possible at the local level. Firstly, ethnic conflict should be resolved by providing political rights along with ethnic identity. Secondly, control over decision-making and resources held by the capital-centric administration should be devolved to the local government through the constitution. However, Magars at the local level perceive that state restructuring is an unavoidable phenomenon for the democratic inclusion of excluded and marginalised groups, like the Magars themselves. They prefer federalism with PR system and strong local governance with full autonomy for empowering the all ethnic and other groups of people without any discrimination and exclusion.

Although some different dilemmas are found in relation to Magar empowerment in politics, the attitudes of Magar activists at the central level are more or less similar to the demands presented by NEFIN and NMA. In this regards, the perception of the Magars at local level regarding their inclusion in democratic polity is also crucial aspect of ethnic politics. Their attitudes on agenda of the state restructuring as per different variables are given below.

¹³⁷ According to the interviews with Suresh Aale (2063/9/12), Lok Bahadur Thapa Magar (2063/8/20), Gam Bahadur Shrish Magar (2063/9/21).

¹³⁸ Interviews with the activists affiliated with Magar students politics, Meena Pun (2063/2/1, Balu Thapa Magar (2063/3/7) of Kaski, Asbir Saru-2063/7/18, Pradeep Rana-2063/7/20 of Palpa and Raj Kumar Thapa Magar and Yasoda Pun-2063/6/29 of Myagdi. NMSU, as their organization is also putting forward their activism for seeking Magar ethnic state (see, Rosh...)

¹³⁹ According to the Tak Bahadur Somai (2063/6/22) of Rimigha, and Ram Bahadur Rana (2063/6/23) of Kuwadi, Pipal danda,; Padam Bahadur Bhdha and Syam Bahadur Gramja (2063/6/20) Somadi of Palpa; Mukta Bahadure Aale and Nar Bahadur Thapa of the Nirmal Pokhari , Jhak Bahadur Thapa Magar of Lumle- Kaski; Dhan Raj Pun 2063/5/2) and Pradeep Pun (2063/7/6) of the Histan, Lal Bahadur Pun (2063/6/11), Baranja of Myagdi etc. expressed views through their interviews that if the state really wants to empower the people through the restructuring of the state then power and resources should be devolved from capital centre to the local villages. This provision ultimately encourages the people to participate in local politics and development, hence, it helps them to decide their own affairs and make citizens more sovereign.

Table No. 9.1

Magars Preferences to the forms of the state restructuring

		Voters								Activists						
		ME A	LA	Q-R S	ME H	FR G	PR S	DK	Total	ME A	LA	Q-R S	ME H	FR G	PR S	Total
Place	Rural	55	136	74	35	123	134	41	235	13	23	3	1	20	30	31
	Urban	14	31	13	5	34	41	15	65	32	17	14	2	28	35	44
Age group	18-30	26	46	17	9	43	53	8	73	6	2	3		6	7	8
	31-45	23	57	33	14	59	61	12	97	25	12	6	2	21	27	32
	46-60	16	39	31	10	36	44	19	79	10	16	5	1	12	20	22
	Above 60	4	23	16	7	19	27	17	51	4	10	3		9	11	13
Level of Edu.	Illiterate	4	21	12	12	22	26	33	69							
	Literate	22	65	40	18	51	69	14	104	12	16	4	1	16	23	25
	High Sch.	26	59	29	7	61	53	7	88	15	14	3		11	20	24
	Campus	17	22	13	3	21	25	2	27	17	9	9	2	8	16	24
	University	1	1			2	2		2	1	1	1		1	2	2
Gender	Male	35	92	58	20	77	95	12	142	39	30	13	3	34	48	57
	Female	34	75	39	20	80	80	44	158	6	10	4		14	17	18
Possession of land Area*	< 11 Rop.	27	65	37	28	57	60	28	124	11	5		1	4	9	10
	11-20 Rop.	22	52	25	4	49	53	9	81	12	7			11	15	15
	20-40 Rop.	6	16	9		14	32	4	25	4	2	3		5	6	7
	> 40 Rop:		3	3	3	3	3		5		1	1		2	2	2
	< 1 Rop:	6	15	8	3	18	21	9	33	11	6	4	1	8	9	13

	1-3 Rop.:	8	14	11	1	13	15	3	24	5	9	5	1	9	10	13
	3-5 Rop.:		1	3	1	1	3	1	4	2	7			3	5	9
	> 5 Rop.:		1	1		2	2	2	4		3	3		6	9	6
District	Kaski	12	48	34	11	61	68	21	100	7	20	7		15	19	25
	Myagdi	30	67	28	9	45	66	18	100	20	12	4		16	23	25
	Palpa	27	52	35	20	51	63	17	100	18	8	6	3	17	23	25
Total		69	167	97	40	157	197	56	300	45	40	17	3	48	65	75

Number Based on Multiple Responses/choices through close ended questionnaires. *Source: Field Survey, 2006.*

M E A – Magar Ethnic Autonomy, L A – Local Autonomy, Q-R S – Quota/Reservation System,

M E H – Magar Ethnic Head in the executive of the State, F R G – Federal and Governments,

P R S – Proportional Representation System, D K – Don't know.

*Note: * Possession of Land Area denotes below 11 Ropani to Above 40 Ropani in Rural parts and below 1 to above 5 Ropani in Urban centers.*

The result is found quite interesting as the cross tabulation analyses mentioned in table no. 9.1, which is constructed through the data collected from close ended questions. The data portrays that for their proper inclusion in the state affairs, the majority of Magar people, both activists and voters, prefer the proportional representation system based on the strength of their population. Almost all of them perceived that this system should be implemented at the central to regional levels in order to empower the Magars. Likewise, the local autonomy is in second priority particularly preferred by the voters. They believed that Magar will be privileged directly if the local government is strengthened with power and resources. Indeed, the self rule policy in democracy enhances the participation culture. Therefore, in their dominated villages, the Magars can be privileged by the state's local authority and they can develop and promote their own places and identity respectively. These types of version were significantly articulated by the general voters from both, villages and town; hence, as the above table shows, the activists of rural parts than urban areas are also more in favour of the local autonomy. On the other side, as per table 9-1, the activists comparatively prefer the federal and regional government based on the geographical division of the state followed by ethnic autonomy rather than local

autonomy. The voters have also given their third priority to the federal and regional government. During the survey with respondents, it seemed that those who wanted the proportional representative system in their first priority, also immediately stressed on the federal and regional government. As they believed through these provisions, Magar will get reasonable representation in the federal or regional government. During the April revolution, the concept of ethnic federalism was not disseminated at the local level, not among the Magars either. It was limited to some activists particularly among the youth in the urban centers. Activists from these places rather than villages and voters prefer the Magar ethnic autonomy. Almost all of them perceived that Magar territory and their identity will be properly developed through the provision of ruling power to them.

The results of the survey also reveal that 18.7 percent of the voters have no opinion on the matter of state restructuring (see Appendix 9). As mentioned in the above table, some voters particularly from rural parts and the activists of urban places significantly consider the reservation and quota systems appropriate for the welfare of Magars along with other ethnic minorities. Reservation is an affirmative action for addressing the ongoing ethnic and regional conflicts. Some of them argue that the executive head of state should represent the Magar ethnic strata, to work in favour of Magar ethnic people. They put forth the justification that the Magar is the most important of 59 ethnic groups and the third largest group overall groups of the population. The executive head is usually a member of high caste hill groups, and has never been from Magar or other groups. Similarly, due to heterogeneous settlements and the Maoist mobilisation Magars from backgrounds, voters and activists of Myagdi and Palpa rather than Kaski, were found favoring Magar ethnic autonomy. The activists from Kaski articulate their interest that the local autonomy is more essential followed by the PR system and federal government, while the activists of Myagdi and Palpa rather than Kaski prefer the PR system and Magar ethnic autonomy followed by the federal government. It shows quite similar perceptions of the Magar voters and activists. Those who live in rural areas, give more priority to local autonomy, PR system and federal government rather than ethnic autonomy. However, according to table 8-1, the Magar who are young, educated, and male and have little property (as opposed to rural, elder, uneducated, female and with much property) prefer Magar ethnic autonomy. In addition to their similar views on PR system, it is also noticed that the activists from rural background seem eager to seek local autonomy; whereas those from urban centers seek ethnic autonomy. It is because the activists are more centered in the urban center and they have been taking various orientations concerning the ethnic autonomy and ethnic rights conducted by

different NGOs and ethnic organisations. However, if one concludes the views expressed through survey study, it seems that both activists and voters prefer proportional representation in polity of the state and federal regional government followed by local autonomy and ethnic autonomy in the process of restructuring the state.

The attitudes of Magar towards restructuring the state at the grass-roots level are strongly influenced in two ways. First, by the nature of their settlements as heterogeneous and homogeneous, and second, by the parties' ideologies, rather than ethnic organisations those are limited to urban centres. Magars settled in mixed society have a loyal consideration to others while demanding their own interests because they have been living together for some time. But on the other hand, those who are settled in their homogeneous society are inclined more to seek the Magarant ethnic autonomy. Likewise, those activists who have been schooled since the establishment of the Maoist and MNLF strongly advocated the Magar ethnic autonomy (Magarant) with right to self determination. Besides this, some activists particularly in the urban areas are also trained on ethnic politics by I/NGOs and those seemed in favour the Magar ethnic autonomy. Through this trend, some other activists who are in the leadership position of different Magar organisations claim the Magar ethnic autonomous province these days, though they had put forwarded just PR system as the major demand previously. Magar ethnic activism has been prevailing in only a few urban centers, therefore, it has not been extensively successful to mobilise rural people towards demanding the Magar autonomy. Moreover, those people in rural areas who are influenced by the ideology of the MNLF also claimed Magarant province for their empowerment in the politics. Nevertheless, due to different political inclinations, it seems that Magar ethnic activists at the local level are in confusion about the federalism regarding whether based on ethnic autonomy or that based on other factors, like geography, economic resources, social composition and historical identity. Therefore, some Magar activists are strongly demanding the ethnic federalism, whereas, some other prefer proper representation in the authority and more comfortable life with fulfillment of their basic needs irrespective of any ethnic federal entity. However, it seems that most of the Magars are convinced that the PR system followed by federal government are the two major means for resolving the ethnic and regional issues, and for promoting sub-nationalism and inclusive democracy. Hence, some of them prioritise local autonomy for self-rule in local affairs and reservation system for their proper representation in polity. They perceived this is the way for persistently consolidating democracy at the grass-roots level. Nevertheless, federalism is an unavoidable issue in contemporary

Nepali politics which needs more discussion to determine, whether it is based on ethnicity alone or on other various factors.

9.3 Federalism: Regional Autonomy Vs Ethnic Autonomy

Magar villagers have not been properly mobilised in favour of autonomy, therefore, the majority of common voters have no proper idea about the agenda. Some perceive autonomy in the form of the *Magarant Rajya*, a state for Magar people as they understand it. Such opinion is found among the people in Maoist dominated areas. Furthermore, in order to mobilise Magars at the local level, MNLF, which is one of the strong ethnic wings of the Maoists, has been advocating the *Magarant* autonomous regions for a few years in the west hills, particularly in the areas where they dominate. Although, it seems relatively ineffectual in an institutional sense, it has, nevertheless spread the knowledge among the Magars in general that autonomy means ethnic (Magar) autonomy through which Magars can rule over their own Magarant territory. On the other side, since the 1990 democracy, particularly post-*Janandolan-II*, the NMA and various Magar organisations affiliated with it have focused their activities in urban regions in order to revitalise ethnic identity and to seek more political representation in proportion to their population. Hence, recently the Magar activists belonging to different ideologies have established the 'Joint Magar Forum' for seeking more ethnic rights with their identity. Magar Ethnic autonomy is one of the major agenda for their activism (SMM, 2065). However, the perception of Magar people at the local level regarding autonomy and forms of autonomy are significant issues in ethnic politics, which are stated in the table below.

Table No. 9.2
What is autonomy?

	Voters			Activists			Frequency		
	Yes	No	Total	Yes	No	Total	Yes	No	Total
Kaski	43 43.0%	57 57.0%	100 100%	23 92.0%	2 8.0%	25 100.0%	66 52.8%	59 47.2%	125 100.0%
Myagdi	47 47.0%	53 53.0%	100 100.0%	25 100%	-	25 100.0%	72 57.6%	53 42.4%	125 100.0%
Palpa	40 40.0%	60 60.0%	100 100.0%	22 88.0%	3 12.0%	25 100.0%	62 49.6%	63 50.4%	125 100.0%
Total	130 43.3%	170 56.7%	300 100.0%	70 93.3%	5 6.7%	75 100.0%	200 53.3%	175 46.7%	375 100.0%

Source: Field Survey, 2006.

As per table no. 9.2, more than 53 percent of Magars understand autonomy. But if we go through cross tables' analysis, it seems that activists are more informed (93.3%) than general voters (43.3%). A large number, as around 57 percent of the commoners and 7 percent of the activists, state that they have no idea about the given issue. Both voters and activists in Myagdi and Kaski rather than Palpa are knowledgeable about autonomy. The researcher observed that among the three districts, people have been found more politically mobilised in Myagdi since the Panchayati era and the Maoist insurgency as well. Likewise, Kaski is the urban hub of the western hills where ethnic activism seems to be occurring a lot and the Magars have been receiving orientations about the contemporary agenda of their organisations. Therefore, the respondents here possess more knowledge about autonomy through political mobilisation. Of those who know about autonomy, some persistently support the agenda of federal ethnic autonomy based on Magar tribe and Magar identity, while some others believe in federal provincial autonomy based on regionalism including geography, economic resources, ethno-demography and cultural importance. The attitudes of the Magar on the form of autonomy are given as follows.

Table No. 9.3**Which forms of Autonomy do you support?**

Form of Autonomy	Voters	Activist	Frequency
Ethnic (Magar) autonomy	63/48.5%/21.0%	31/44.3%/41.3%	94/47.0%/25.1%
Regional autonomy	53/40.8%/17.7%	33/47.1%/44.0%	86/43.0%/22.9%
Don't know	14/10.8%/4.7%	6/8.6%/8.0%	20/10.0%/5.3%
Sub-Total	130/100.0%/43.3%	70/100.0%/93.3%	200/100.0%/53.3%
Missing System	170/56.7%	5/6.7%	175/46.7%
Total	300/100.0%	75/100%	375/100.0%

Source: Field Survey, 2006.

The above table no. 9.3 shows that the voters support ethnic autonomy (48.5%) rather than regional autonomy (40.8%); whereas activists seem slightly more inclined towards regional autonomy (47.1%) as opposed to ethnic autonomy (44.3%). Likewise, the above table also displays that those who are aware of autonomy and who support ethnic (Magar) autonomy constitute 47 percent. Those who support regional autonomy constitute 43 percent. There are also those who have no idea about it, they constitute only 10 percent. Hence, the above table has also mentioned that among all 375 respondents, 25.9 percent seem in favour of ethnic autonomy followed by 22.1 percent who favour regional autonomy based on territory rather than on ethnicity. Following study discusses about the issues of autonomy through diverse variables.

Table No. 9.4

Which Forms of Autonomy do you support?

		Voters				Activists			
		E A	F R A	D K	Total	E A	F R A	D K	Total
Age Group	18-30	25	16	2	43	4	4		8
	31-45	19	19	6	44	14	14	4	32
	46-60	16	10	6	32	10	7	2	19
	> 60	3	8		11	3	8		11
Level of education	Illiterate	4	7	3	14				
	Literate	17	18	7	42	8	10	2	20
	High School	27	14	3	44	10	12	2	24
	Campus	15	12	1	28	11	11	2	24
	University		2		2	2			2
Possession of land area	< 11 Rop: Rural	26	12	6	44	6	2		8
	11-20 Rural	19	20	3	42	7	7		14
	20-40 Rural	5	3	1	9	1	6		7
	> 40 Rural		1	1	2	1	1		2
	< 1 Rop.: Urban	6	7	2	15	7	2	3	12
	1-3 : Urban	7	8		15	4	8	1	13
	3-5:: Urban		1	1	2	4	3	1	8
	> 5 : Urban		1		1	1	4	1	6
Religion	Hindu	41	46	13	100	12	21	1	34
	Buddha	13	2		15	6	5	5	16
	Ani-Shamanism	8	5	1	14	11	6		17
	Christian	1			1	1			1
	Nastik					1	1		2
Native language	Speaker	15	18	2	35	7	11	1	19
	A little bit speak	5	5		10	7	7	5	19
	Non-speaker	43	30	12	85	17	15		32
Gender	Male	33	36	6	75	28	24	2	54
	Female	30	17	8	55	3	9	4	16
Place of Resident	Rural	50	36	11	97	14	14		28
	Urban	13	17	3	33	17	19	6	42

District	Kaski	13	25	5	43	6	15	2	23
	Myagdi	26	13	8	47	16	6	3	25
	Palpa	24	15	1	40	9	12	1	22
Total		63	53	14	130	31	33	6	70

Source: Field Survey, 2006.

(Note: EA refers Ethnic Autonomy, FRA refers Federal Regional Autonomy, DK-Don't know)

As per table no. 9.4, if we analyse the cross tabulation, according to various variables like education, age and place of residence, then it seems that respondents from a younger age group, educated from high school to intermediate levels, and from rural and homogeneous society are in support of ethnic autonomy, in contrast to respondents from the elder age group, less educated, and from urban and heterogeneous society. But the views from highly educated Magars are divided fifty-fifty. Out of the total four respondents with university degrees, two activists are in favour of autonomy of ethnic structure and two voters are in favour of a regional provinces structure based on geographical and economical access instead of solely on ethnic character. So far as the variables like religion and mother tongue are concerned, it is interesting to note that Hindu respondents are more in favour of geographical autonomy than Buddhist, animist-shamanist and Christian who give more support to ethnic autonomy. As for property possession, the respondents who have less property support ethnic autonomy, whilst those who have relatively more property think that regional autonomy is the better. Likewise, Magars from Myagdi and Palpa rather than Kaski are found favouring ethnic autonomy. It is obviously mentioned in above discussion that these districts are the Magar dominated and found more under Maoist influence; therefore, they support Magarant ethnic autonomy. On the other side, Magars of both backgrounds from Kaski are in support of regional autonomy. Moreover, the above mentioned table exhibits that Magars of Kaski prefer regional autonomy where all segments of the people at local level can be privileged. This is because along with urbanisation and modernisation, the heterogeneous composition of the population has been found more in Kaski district and other urban parts which encourage secular ideas such as the welfare of all groups, irrespective of any boundaries of ethno-nationalism. The perception of Magar people at the local level regarding ethnic autonomy is crucial issue for political stability. Their meaning on ethnic autonomy has been shown as follows.

Table No. 9.5

How do you define the Ethnic (Magar) autonomy?

Magar (ethnic) Autonomy Mean	Voters	Activists	Total
Gain of ethnic rights	19 / 14.6%	2 / 2.9%	21 / 10.5%
Socio-economic and political benefits for Magars	4 / 3.1%	4 / 5.7%	8 / 4.0%

Development of Magar culture and language	2 / 1.5%	2 / 2.9%	4 / 2.0%
Magar autonomous republic state	37 / 28.5%	22 / 31.4%	59 / 29.5%
Against social harmony and national integration	44 / 33.8%	33 / 47.1%	77 / 38.5%
Don't know	24 / 18.5%	7 / 10.0%	31 / 15.5%
Total	130/100.0%	70/ 100.0%	200/100.0%

Source: Field Survey, 2006.

The above table no. 9.5 reveals that 29.5 % (31.4 percent activists and 28.5 percent voters) define that ethnic autonomy means Magar ethnic autonomous republic federal state. Furthermore, majority of them, particularly the activists of the urban centre believe that the right to self-determination is preserved in such Magarant autonomy. Some of them think if existing time and situation favour division, then the autonomous province may secede from the central authority. Some of those activists from Magar dominated villages who support ethnic (Magar) autonomy argued that it is the only means of belonging to the native territory as the foundation of their historical identity and of enabling Magars to be sovereign in their autonomy through their hegemonic leadership. But, some Magars (10.5%) -14.6 percent of the voters followed by 2.9 percent of the activists – think that it is the only process for seeking more ethnic rights, followed by some others (4%) who believe that Magars will be socially, economically and politically privileged through ethnic autonomy. Likewise, 2 percent of Magars believe that with ethnic autonomy, Magar culture and language can grow and develop.

On the other side, table no. 9.5 also shows that the highest percentage (38.5 %) of Magars – 47 percent of the activists and around 34 percent of the voters - perceive ethnic autonomy in a negative sense, and at odds with social harmony and national integration. Most of them suppose that ethnic autonomy with the right to self-determination means the path of disorder and instability. Hence, they further stated that this is ultimately a threat to national integration, since many other ethnic and caste groups have co-existed from time immemorial. A large number of activists and some commoners at the local level expressed their views that the ethnic groups should be privileged through their inherent ethnic rights along with political, economic and cultural sectors. Each ethnic group can be strengthened in polity, if there is the provision of proportional representation along with the lines of ethnic identity. They further stated that in order to resolve the ethnic conflict forever, the regional province with full autonomy should be constituted appropriately, instead of the absolute ethnic autonomy based on one particular ethnic group such as Magar. They fear that some ethnic extremists and armed forces may interpret ethnic autonomy including rights to self-determination as the right to secession. Therefore, the majority of them stressed regional autonomy as the provinces or counties that are based on geographical access, with available natural resources and settlements of ethnic groups with similar

languages or other ethnic characters. Some key informants said in their interviews that the political and ethnic rights, particularly economic and cultural rights should be mentioned in the new constitution in order to recognise the sub-national ethnic identities of all groups of Nepali population. Moreover, besides the Nepali language, other ethnic languages should be privileged through schooling in their dominated regions and at least two major ethnic languages should be recognised officially in these regional provinces. Through these politics, Nepali nationality and nation-building would be strengthened, increasing national integration and democratisation.

Magar activists, particularly in urban centers, are well known about the principle of right to self determination as well as they have also noticed about the ethnic wars that have conducted in the states of former USSR and Yugoslavia. Moreover, a few intellectual activists have the knowledge about the condition of so many countries of Africa, South America and Asia. They have the knowledge that so many countries there are affected with instability and disorder due to ethnic conflict and racial genocide. A few of them have cited the examples of Nigeria and Ethiopia that represented ethnic autonomy and federalism. Affected by ethnic violence, these counties are less developed. Therefore, they believe that the ethnic autonomy with the right to self-determination is not only the best model for resolving the conflict in multiethnic and multicultural state. The nature of the federal provinces accordingly by them should be formulated through the wider consensus among the political and ethnic forces, and civil society. Hence, some educated Magar activists from urban and plural societies perceived that the federalism based on ethnic autonomy and special rights is undoubtedly the first choice for Magars. But, as they suggested, it would be better if it is determined through the will of all castes and ethnic groups settled in given territory through the means of referendum. However, through the presentation mentioned in previous paragraphs, it seems that majority of the activists are in favour of proportional representation and federal system that is based on characteristics of historical identity, geography, economic and development conditions, and ethnic/caste composition rather than only in favour of ethnic autonomy with the right to self-determination. But they preferred that the authorities and resources of the state should be allocated in all segments of population group of the state. Hence, accordingly each group of the people should be privileged by reasonable representations in the polity of the state as well as their inherent ethnic and cultural rights along with keeping multicultural harmony of the society. These concepts ultimately strengthen the inclusion and contribute positively to the consolidation of democracy.

9.4 Discourses on Federalism and Ethnic (Magars) Empowerment

In the post April (2006) revolution, different ethnic organisations and their activists have been putting forward their demand of ethnic autonomy with the right to self-determination

through various activisms in urban centers, particularly in the capital city. Besides the demands of the activists, no one ethnic group at the local level has initiated any activity for seeking ethnic province. Likewise, not any ethnic organisation has presented a clear picture or form of ethnic autonomy on the ground of various castes and ethnicities that have been living together since time immemorial. At the local level, some Magars are positively impressed by the demands made by their ethnic organisations and Maoists. Among them, some strongly favour ethnic autonomy along with the right to self-determination while some have moderate view towards it¹⁴⁰. Some Magar leaders at the centre who are associated with MNLF and are pro-ethnics have the explicit approach that Magar will be empowered in the mainstream polity through the provision of the Magarant province with ethnic autonomy and right to- self determination. They wanted to have a situation wherein Magars will have the especial rights (*Agradhikar*) along with the economic, ethnic, cultural and political rights. As fifty one percent representation goes to the Magars, the other castes and ethnic groups will get proportional representation through the remaining quotas. Magar language will be the official language and the chief executive post will be held by the Magar in the proposed Magarant. If the other ethnic groups (other than Magars) are in majority in certain villages or district, they will have their own sub-autonomy under the Magarant.

Accordingly, the provision of the special rights for the Magars will continue which implies that periodic election will not affect their autonomous right. On the other, according to the moderate view, they principally accept ethnic autonomy for the welfare of Magars, but they don't believe that it would be possible due to two reasons. First, it is very difficult to manage diverse settlements of caste and other ethnic people. They believe it prepares fertile land for unrest and ethnic conflicts. Second, in the absence of economic resources and infrastructures, no province can become fully autonomous or independent. Hence, an advisor of NMA and MNLF said in his interview that 'undoubtedly, the Magarant autonomous region is the best form of structure for political empowerment of Magars with their identity, but it is very difficult to manage the heterogeneous settlements that we have.' He further stated that most of the Magar and Gurung activists in ethnic movements at a local level are in confusion for thinking that they will have hegemonic authority and power in proposed ethnic federalism as Magarant autonomous region. The researcher has also similar experiences when he observed many programmes related with ethnicity,

¹⁴⁰ The activists affiliated with the Maoist ethnic wings, like the MNLF and some leaders of the NEFIN have represented the hard approach, as without ethnic autonomy and right to self-determination no ethnic group will be politically and ethnically privileged, whereas other activists of various parties and ethnic organisations deserve the moderate approach that proportional representation in the various organs of state along with the guarantee of their ethnic rights and identities are necessary in order to empower the ethnic people .

inclusion and state restructuring organised by NGOs and ethnic associations at the local level.

The researcher during his field study obtained two interesting examples related to this. First, a Magar activist in Lumle VDC of Kaski district shared with the researcher that a few weeks before his arrival in this village, there was a gathering of *Tamuwan* National Liberation Front for *Tamuwan* Autonomous state. In the programme one of the Maoists leaders delivered a speech that the territory of the village is under the *Tamuwan* and they are going to establish the Tamu government through the Gurung representatives. Then a Magar, an activist at the local village, asked the Maoist “if the territory remains a place of the Gurung people and controlled by them, then where shall we go with other people like, Magars? Should we leave the village and go to a Magar dominant region?” He further said with the researcher that the Maoist leader did not make any comments, just replied that he will forward this view to his superiors¹⁴¹. The next example is from a regional-level gathering of MNLF, held in Pokhara on March 7, 2007, participated in by almost all the leaders of the MNLF. The well known Gurung activist and the chairman of *Tamu Dhi* also participated in the programme. During her speech she raised a question as “if there is a Brahmin Judge instead of Gurung in our *Tamuwan* state, what is the Maoist policy towards ethnic autonomy? Is it just an illusion and only an exploited sentiment of Gurung and Magar people to the Maoists’ interest for power seeking?” Although there is no confusion among the Maoist’s Magar leaders, as they told the researcher in their interviews, it seems that most of the ethnic activists at the local level are in confusion through the idea that they will have hegemonic authority in their ethnic federal province.

A local Magar activist in Somadi of Palpa said that he knows about ethnic autonomy and it is very nice to listen, but how could it be possible when various ethnic and caste groups of people have been living together in the same hamlets and villages since unknown past. He further stated that they are poor farmers; therefore they want basic needs like employment, development, peace, health and education facilities in their locality. Similar views were also expressed by two local Magar activists in Baranja who were representatives in the VDC through the local election of 1997. They said that if the state empowers the local government with power and resources, then people in the village will be directly privileged, irrespective of any discrimination. Through power and resources, the local government can provide the basic needs for the village people and construct the basic infrastructure for development. The former chairman of Baranja village, Myagdi stated that ‘locating the power and resources at local government denotes that it will have the decisive role in local

¹⁴¹ An interview with a 45 year-old Magar Activist at Tolka of Lumle VDC.

affairs and it encourages grass root people to be actively involved in such affairs'. But he added that the reasonable representation of major groups of population in this local government body was also necessary. He further stated that 'if there is a minority who can not be represented in the local government due to their low population then reservation can be mentioned for their participation in such unit of government'. Likewise, the activist of Lumle village of Kaski put forward his view in his interview that local government with full autonomy in decision-making and resources will be better than an ethnic or federal government. He thought that through the former provision, people at the grass-root level will benefit, whereas some activists can get more representations through the latter. However, the discussion mentioned above reveal that the Magar people at the local level expected to seek peace, development and progress in their locality either through Magar autonomy or local autonomy.

Many ordinary voters are concerned about their relatively easier life in terms of availability of basic daily needs with reasonable price, health and education facilities and motor road in their local villages rather than construction of any federal units. It seemed that the commoners didn't worry about federalism either based on regional autonomy or ethnic autonomy; they were much more worried about their livelihood. Almost all Magar students at campus perceived that education, health, and employment opportunities are more important than any other activism (Baral 2008). A foreign scholar has also found similar view among the Kham Magar (de sales 2002). Likewise, the researcher found in his field work at the rural villages that most of the people expected government consideration towards them through provision of cattle, seeds of crop and fertilisers in subsidies and training for more production and government efforts for accessing their production in market. Almost all activists from farming background at various local villages of the field study area said that 'they worry about their livelihood, education for their children and their jobs, rather than slogans and speeches of leaders from their own or others'. Therefore, the Magar activists who are already represented at the local government stated that 'if more and more power and resources are available in their local village rather than at a regional or central level, they can make their villages and hamlets prosperous by deciding their own affairs, directly by themselves through participating in such local self-government'¹⁴². However, democracy in their view is a system of making powerful and competitive citizens. For this, the government efforts need to be centered towards its delivery for the welfare of the people. Indeed, it is the substantial view of the inclusive democracy, which represents the ordinary citizens at the grass-roots level, including the Magars.

¹⁴² Interviews with Jhak Bahadur Thapa Magar of the Lumle VDC, Padam Bahadur Bhdha and Lal Bahadur Pun of the Baranja VDC, who were the representatives in the executive body of the respected village in 1997-2002.

Some senior Magar activists in Pokhara and Tansen oppose absolute ethnic autonomy which is organised through particular ethnic trade in the way that ‘we criticized and went against the Hindu state in order to make it secular. After *Janandolan-II* we got it and now we are in a secular state though officially Hindus are in majority. Therefore, providing this type of ethnic autonomy for distinct ethnic group will be complicated.’ Hence, they said that ‘it is not justice that in the name of inclusion of marginal ethnicity, no other group should be excluded, because it will create grounds for another conflict forever’. They thought besides a few districts, Magar ethnicity is not in the majority and many groups of the population with their identities have been living together through the heterogeneous settlements for the unknown past. An activist of the NMA-Kaski said in his interview that ‘We, the Magar in Kaski will be again subordinate and excluded in the Tamuwan province, in where only Gurungs will have the monopoly ruling power with their identity’. Nevertheless, almost all of them believed that the excluded and marginal groups of people like, Dalits, ethnic and people from less developed regions should be politically, economically, socially and culturally privileged by the state. Hence, they further stated that autonomy should be provided for local people to rule themselves through popular participation irrespective of any dominant ethnic group.

The considerations of those Magar activists towards the agenda of state restructuring as expressed in the group discussion that was held in Tansen and Pokhara during the field study are seem relatively rational approach for resolving the ethnic interests. The approach is that federalism should be established through geographical divisions of the country by covering as much as each major ethnic group in one region or province. In such a federal set up, economic means and resources, development infrastructures, administrative access and the will of the people should have proper consideration. Within federalism, provincial government should be established through the PR system in proportion to the size of each caste and ethnic group. Besides the federal provinces, local units of government are also necessary through autonomy at the grass-root level. At the local level, it is the best means of inclusion with popular participation in the body politic by sovereign citizens with reconciliation of ethnic, regional and local interests which result in political culture through “democratisation” of democracy. A report also has enlightened this fact (IDEA 2001). If authority is distributed through the devolution of power towards local governance, as VDC and Municipality, as well as at the ward level, then these sorts of autonomy represent a realistic way for people to decide their own affairs and achieve ethnic rights. Moreover, by providing and mobilising the resources and authorities at the local level, ultimately reinforce the participant political culture and the development

activities. Likewise, ethnic minorities and underprivileged groups of people become sovereign in their areas. It helps to resolve the ethnic conflicts if the decision power and resources are granted, and the identities recognised. Therefore, devolution of power and resources at the local polity is the bedrock for consolidating democracy in multicultural and multiethnic Nepal.

The restructuring of the state regarding the Magarant ethnic autonomy is controversial due to the highly complex territorial and ethnic composition on the one hand and the diverse ethnic identities and settlements of Magar group itself on the other. Hence, some activists have proposed the *Magarant* autonomy be based on the Swiss model, as a collection of counties or autonomous districts similar to the situation in Nepal, while others have proposed *Magarant* province and *Magarant* autonomous republic¹⁴³. However, around a year earlier, NMA and other Magar sister organisations of different political parties established the *Samukta Magar Manch* (SMM). Through the forum they have put forward the demand for seeking the Magar autonomous province and other sub-autonomous regions in west hills and other major settlements respectively. It has proposed the Magarant including northern and southern Magar territory and two sub-autonomous regions in the east and the west of Magarant (see Appendix 9).

So for the Maoist approach on ethnicity, it does not mean only the primordial concept of ethnic ties, moreover, it is close to the instrumental and constructive definition of ethnicity. Actually, ethnicity in Nepalese context is more than *jat-jati* or race and caste, it refer to common language, common culture, common geography, common economy and common psychology with permanent and static human group, that is nationality¹⁴⁴. But they could not clearly mention how to manage the interest of other ethnic minorities and other groups of people who have been settling along with the dominant ethnic nationality since a long time ago. Therefore, their ethnic rights and representation should be managed with the norms of inclusive democracy and principle of co-existence. Hence, in order to seek peace, progressive, developed and civilized autonomous region, sub autonomy region and rights for minority should be clearly declared in each ethnic province. Recently, the CA committee of the state restructuring has proposed 14 provinces among which 12 are based on ethnic identity and 2 on regional basis. Many Magar activists told with the researcher that they are

¹⁴³ Surendra Thapa Magar, *Rajyako Punasamrachanama Magarharuko Bato* (Way of Magar on the Restructuring the State). A discussion Paper presented in National Gathering for Orientation, 22-23/3/2064, organized by Nepal Democratic Magar Association; *Op. cite*, C P N Maoist 2008 and *Magarant* 2063.

¹⁴⁴ These perceptions are based on the interviews with Suresh Ale and Lok Bahadur Thapa Magar, the leaders of the MNLF and the Maoist party.

not satisfied with the boundary of the Magarant province that has proposed by the CA committee. The ethnic composition in proposed Magarant province is given in the following table.

Table No. 9.6
Population Composition in the Proposed Magarant Province

District	Brahmin	Chhetri	Magar	Janajatis	Dalits	Madesi	Muslim	Total
Palpa	52206	25797	136750	20659	31575	665	906	268558
Gulmi	89124	72813	59123	19457	54952	764	421	296654
Arghakhanchi	78127	39893	34078	14283	38732	1362	1916	208391
Rolpa	6451	72833	91936	2871	35248	544	121	210004
Baglung	60813	56333	74550	15037	61010	699	495	268937
Myagdi	9363	21135	47820	8926	26092	948	163	114447
Pyuthan	31205	60127	65123	12138	42583	659	649	212484
Syanja	37410	14608	47156	23724	16890	286	133	140207
Tanahun	5781	5741	40342	8372	11959	99	72	72366
Kaski	459	283	582	1113	1241	-	-	3678
Nawalparasi	15202	9153	56480	22820	13915	292	112	117974
Rukkum	762	15800	19063	1015	2332	52	71	39095
Salyan	-	942	2737	8	626	-	-	4313
Parbat	19907	9187	9437	5498	11602	-	-	55631
Total	406810	404645	685177	155921	348817	6370	5059	2012799
Percent	20.2	20.1	34.0	7.7	17.3	0.3	0.2	100

Source: The table is constructed on the basis of the report of the State Restructuring Committee of CA and Census Report-2001.

As per table no. 9.6, Magars appear to be the major group followed by the Brahmin and Chhetri in the proposed Magarant province. Although Magar can not hold the majority in the Magarant, the territorial boundary with population composition proposed by different sectors have found that the Magar is the second largest group after the high caste hill group. A political scientist has also stated in his paper that, 'along with Magarant autonomous region, all the other proposed ethnic regions based on ethnic composition are also "highly heterogeneous and multiethnic" (Baral, 2007: 15). On the other side, the Magar activists associated with NMA are not satisfied with the Magarant boundary proposed by the CA's state restructuring committee. Although, it is still under study, the latest version is that the boundary of the Magarant would be determined through inclusion of as much as

Magar dominated settlements rather than only considering the river lines¹⁴⁵. The chairman of the NMA also said that NMA itself is working towards making boundary of the Magarant. As per him, the NMA is dissatisfied with the proposed boundary of the Magarant prepared by the state restructuring committee of the CA. Therefore, the Magar activists perceived that the proposed Magarant province should be redesigned with territorial boundary including more and more Magar settlements in the west hills though Magars are not in majority. On other side, besides the Maoists, many political parties are opposed to the ethnic province. Likewise, many protests are conducted by the activists of Brahmin, Chhetri and other ethnic groups. Hence, some Gurung activists even from the Maoist at local level are also dissatisfied with the boundary of the Tamuwani as they claim many villages which should belong to the Tamuwani are included in the Magarant. Therefore, although most of the ethnic activists from different parties in CA have principally accepted the Magarant for Magars but seeking this province is still in dilemma due to unsatisfied voices that are against the ethnic autonomy in particular group of the people as there are many other groups of the people in majority in such ethnic autonomous province.

The previous discussion reveals that it seems difficult to manage the Magarant and other ethnic provinces in where no any distinct ethnic group is in the majority in proposed province for them. Indeed, Nepali societies are highly heterogeneous by their multiethnic and multicultural characters. Therefore, besides some districts, no province proposed by the Maoists or other ethnic organisations, has a single ethnic group in majority¹⁴⁶. Due to extreme geographic and ethnic diversity and in view of the economy, development and management of Nepal's sovereignty and unity, two prominent political scientists, Prof. Baral and Khanal, have advocated two different models, 'cooperative-federalism' and 'quasi-

¹⁴⁵ Interview with Deepak Charti Magar in 2066/4/6. He is an advisor of the MNLF as well as working with the making boundary of the Magarant through field survey. According to him, he is trying to include all major Magar settlements of the Parbat, Dang, Nawalparasi, Syangja and Tanahun district. He said that most of the Magars from different villages want to be a part of the Magarant, hence, some Brahmins and Chhetris requested him to annex their villages in the Magarant rather other ethnic province like, Tamuwani.

¹⁴⁶ If we go with the National Population Census 2001, then we see that few of the districts and VDCs/ Municipalities are dominated by a particular caste or ethnic group. Around 70 percent of the VDCs/Municipalities do not have more than half of the population from any ethnic-caste groups. Likewise, more than 82 percent of the districts and about 62 percent of the VDCs/Municipalities do not have more than half of the population from mother-tongues other than Nepali. Jivan Subedi, "Constituting State Power Locus in Diverse Nepal", a seminar paper presented in *Constitutional and diversity in Nepal*, Organized by Mideia/CNAS, Kathmandu, August 22-24, 2007.

federalism' for restructuring the Nepali state¹⁴⁷. Through these models, both of them expect resolution of ethnic and regional conflicts. It is necessary to accommodate diverse identities in order to enable different ethnic, caste and cultural groups of people to live together and to consolidate democracy and nation-building. Democracy is the centre of politics because it looks at ways to deal with power conflicts in society. Each country has its own set of procedures and limitations, each claiming to be democratic trying to manage the conflict and instability but it should be "based on a distinctive mix of beliefs about what is important for democracy, what is feasible and what is acceptable to the population" (Catt, 1999 : 5). The form of federalism, therefore, should be designed based on Nepali character which will be acceptable and feasible to the all caste and ethnic population for strengthening and implementing the inclusive democracy. Hence, a report deals that "Nepali federalism must be flexible and homegrown, developed and decided by its own citizens with their effective participation" (NHDR, 2009 : 106).

On the other side, since the April 2006 revolution, the NMA, as a common platform of Magars from various ideologies and cultures throughout the country, has been mobilising its activities in favour of seeking *Magarant* ethnic autonomous region. It has demanded the *Magarant* federal autonomous province with the right to self-decision in its historical *Magarant* territory, which includes Palpa, Nawalparasi, Syangja, Tanahun, Gulmi, Arghakanchi, Dang, Pyuthan, Salyan, Surkhet, Rolpa, Rukum, Banglung, Myagdi, Parbat and Dolpa districts in the west hills. In addition to these, some sub-autonomous provinces and autonomy to villages at the local level are also proposed. Recently, the Samukta Magar Manch (Joint Magar Forum-2009) (SMM, 2065) has been established with the initiation by different Magar organisations namely, NMA, MNLF (U-Maoist), NDMA (UML), NNMA (NC), NMAA (NCP-United) and MHC (PLP). Seeking Magar ethnic autonomous province with right to self-determination and sub-autonomy with varying rights for making capable, independent and prosperous Magar society are major aims of the forum. It seems that the SMM will strengthen the Magar activism uniting the different Magar organisations and activists for seeking Magar ethnic province and empowering them politically, economically and culturally (Magarant, 2065VS: 30-9). However, as per the activism made by the Magar ethnic activists and different Magar organizations, the state could not easily escape from the demand of the *Magarant* region as the ethnic autonomous province for the Magar people. Likewise, the management of the expectation of the poor people for their access to the resources and authority of the

¹⁴⁷ Lok Raj Baral, "Nepal: The Restructuring of a Neo-Patrimonial State", and Krishna Khanal, "Restructuring of the Nepali State: The Federal Perspective", both seminar papers are presented on *Restructuring the Nepali State*, 29-30 June, 2007, Kathmandu: Organized by NCCS.

polity irrespective of caste, ethnicity, religion, language and other divisions of human society also seem to be a challenging issue. Hence, there are the majority of the ethnic groups and other people who consider that the concept of ethnic province has added complexity to the problems already existed. Therefore, the state has dual responsibilities. First, it has to manage the ethnic problems with some sort of privileges for the ethnic people. Secondly, the resources and the state itself should be accessible among the poor people and at the local level for resolving the conflict and exclusion for ever.

Indeed, the Magar ethnic group itself is diverse in terms of culture, religion, language, clan and geography and has divided into two major groups; west and east or it can be said northern and southern as *Athar* and *Barha Magarant* regions respectively. Hence, some sort of differences in their religion, language and culture are also found even among the Magars of same village or district¹⁴⁸. Therefore, it is myopic to make one territorial boundary along with imposing one culture and one language in the name of uniformity of Magar ethnic identity instead of recognising and promoting multicultural identities. Therefore, considering primordial ethnic identities, if there is to be a province for Magars, and then at least two district structures are needed in order to cover different regions of Magars, i.e. *Ganadaki-Lumbini* region and *Dhaulagiri-Rapti-Bheri* Region due to the diverse culture, language and settlements of geographical boundaries of the Magar ethnic group itself. In addition to this, many local level autonomous types of government could be created for self-rule by the Magars themselves, in many districts like *Humla*, *Udayapur*, *Bardiya* and others. Since, many villages and hamlets are significantly dominated by Magar population; they can actively participate in their own territorial polity through the provision of effective autonomous local units of government, as mentioned in the constitution.

Most of the Magar activists and Magar organisations demanded Magarant ethnic autonomy with right to self determination and special rights to Magars for their empowerment in the main stream of state affairs. In places where at least fifty-one percent representation goes to Magars, the remaining forty-nine percent will be allocated with other ethnic and caste groups that reside in Magarant. Some Magar activists at the central level believe that though all caste and ethnic groups are in minority, the Brahmin, Chhetri and Newar as the traditional ruling elites dominated

¹⁴⁸ Uma Nath Baral, "Magar Activism in Kaski, Nepal", A seminar paper presented on *Activism and Civil Society in South Asia: Special references to Nepal and Sri Lanka*, June 26-28, 2005, organized by Oxford University, UK. Also see, "Kaskima Magar Andolan" (Magar Movement in Kaski), in *Janapragyamanch*, No. 6, 2005, Pokhara: TUTA, Janapriya Campus Unit.

and privileged in the state power and resources, hence, their culture and language have the state authority. As a result, the rest is deprived politically, culturally and economically. Therefore, they are psychologically advanced than Magar and other ethnic groups. They suggested that the special rights for that ethnic group who will have their own ethnic autonomy will last for two or three elections. Then, there will be no special rights for any group, all representations will be made in proportion to all the ethnic and caste groups. While the activists at the local level do not have such hard and fast opinion about the Magarant, most of them have moderate idea as their language and culture should be officially recognised and operated in the Magar dominated dense province or district. They also perceived that if the representations in the local to the central government depended on the strength of their population, then the ethnic conflict will be resolved. However, most of the activists seem to be in favour of ethnic autonomy with effective local units of governance through which all segments of population will benefit through participation of power and decision-making authority at the local level.

Above all, a demand for ethnic autonomy with rights to self-determination has been forwarded by Magar activists in order to secure their rights and representation. It seems that the state needs to ensure ethnic rights and representation in proportion to the Magar population through a new constitution along with distributing authority and resources in a federal structure. Only then the ethnic (Magar) activists rethink the slogan of ethnic autonomy and rights to self-determination (in terms of its political meaning). However, the federal autonomy in the forms of province or county is an unavoidable phenomenon in order to accommodate and address the geographic and cultural diversity of Nepal. Hence, federalism is expected as only a necessary agenda for empowering the marginal and excluded groups of the people. Resolving the political conflict through devolution of power and resources at the local level seems to be the best means of democratic inclusion. In the Magarant ethnic autonomous region that is controlled by the Maoist party through the Magar National Liberation Front, there is still confusion about how to govern within state jurisdiction, because they are also a part of the existing Nepalese government. Hence, they have publicly declared that they accept multiparty democracy and are involved in the ongoing democratisation project. However, the Maoist party appeared as the major party (the largest party) with significant numbers in the CA. Therefore, it has the influential role in restructuring the state and designing the federalism. However, recognition of the Magar ethnic identity in politics through providing wider representation at the local to the central polity is the urgent need to resolve the conflict in Magar dominant region. For seeking the Magar ethnic province and empowering the Magar in various sectors of the society, all Magar activists from different ideologies have come in one forum which ultimately strengthens their political identity. However, the Constituent Assembly, which has organised

through the popular representations of different segments of Nepali society, the sustainable peace, prosperous and development more or less, depends on its decision and new constitution. Therefore, the process of constitution making is very crucial for state and policy makers in order to empower the ethnic and other marginal groups of the society.

9.5 Conclusion

Nepal is home for about one hundred castes and ethnic people. Therefore, traditional model of liberal democracy is unsuitable to existing multiethnic and multicultural society of Nepal. Considering the state of multiethnic and multiculturalism, federal policy may only be suitable to recognise this wider cultural variety and to resolve the ethnic and regional conflicts. The constitutions that were implemented over the past fifty years were all inadequate for the allocation of equitable representations in decision-making and reasonable distribution of the resources to the people from marginal ethnicity to excluded geography. Nevertheless, now the state is in the process of restructuring through which a consensus is expected among the power seekers such as ethnic and political forces. The democratic consociationalism as power sharing process facilitates to resolve the existing ethnic and regional conflicts. For instance, in order to include the marginalised and disadvantaged group of people in the polity of a state, the PR system was designed in the CA election through consensus among the major political parties. As a result many ethnic and Dalits have obtained the opportunity in the decision making body of the state. It seems that Magars, in general, have reasonable view about it, because this is the right way for inclusion of many ethnic groups including Magars in the state polity with recurring its exclusionary character. The official data of Magar representation in the parliament that are mentioned in the previous chapter three shows that relatively with previous elections, Magars have increased their numbers of representatives in the CA due to the provision of the PR system. Therefore, PR system is found more inclusive for accessing the power seekers ethnic and political forces in the polity of the state. Hence, we can justify it through the evidence as it is in practice throughout the world that has introduced the institutional choice of PR system succeeding to resolve the ethnic conflict. In a nutshell, it can be said that the institutional practice of PR can be redesigned democracy in multicultural states (Bastian and Luckham 2003).

On the other hand, the state could not avoid federalism and local autonomy for addressing geographical, ethnic and cultural diversity breaking the feudal, centralised and monopolised rule of a few high caste hill elites. But the forms of federalism should be considered by mutual consensus among the political parties and ethnic forces. Hopefully, political and ethnic elites manage the demands of ethnic federalism with the rights to self-determination, since no single ethnic group has majority in such proposed units of state, and no group of people be excluded in the polity in future. For instance, the Magar ethnic group itself has

not got the majority in the proposed Magarant federal autonomous region. In addition to this, no single unit of territory in the form of province or federal structure can survive independently. Due to the diverse geographical, cultural and demographic characteristics of Nepalese society, co-operation, tolerance and close relationship with other units is the basic need for their existence. Hence, while making federal provinces, the economic aspect needs to be seriously considered since Nepal itself is dependent on foreign aid. However, ethnic conflicts can only be resolved through fair representation in the state's decision making body and their access to the power and resources of the state at local level along with the guarantee of their ethnic rights and identity. This is the view that is widely found among the Magars at the grass roots level. Undoubtedly, the views mentioned above are possible at least if the PR system is based on each ethnic and caste group's population and if federated provinces are based on rational division of the state in order to be governed by the people themselves.

Indeed, the state restructuring and inclusive democracy are needed to address the demands of the local people and their diverse identities. The Nepali state needs reasonable and rational management through the formation of state policies in order to empower and uplift the deprived, underprivileged, excluded and marginalised sector of people in the polity of the state. But through these policies, the power and resources of the state should be devolved to people at the grass-roots level and to territorial organisations that favour the ethnic and geographic diversity of the country. For this, at least two levels of autonomous governments - the provinces at the regional level and local units of governments at the grassroots level - should be restructured along with the devolution of power, resources and decision-making authority through a new constitution. Nepal's diverse ethno-demography and geography requires a combination that would aid interaction between different levels of government, producing a system where people and societies are empowered, and where there are avenues for the expression of different ethnic and territorial identities through self-rule. However, in the course of devolution of power and resources of the central authority, priority should be given to the local units of the government rather than to a federated regional unit. Thus, devolution of power and jurisdictions, along with the rights and duties of central, federal and local governments should all be clearly mentioned in the new constitution. Such restructuring through three layers of government prevents authoritative tendencies of rulers and ultimately promotes consensual democracy. It will, thus, consolidate democracy through popular political participation at the grass-roots level. Moreover, it will launch the country into a new phase of nation-building based on recognising the multicultural identities and empowerment of the people.

CHAPTER X

CONCLUSION

Nepal is renowned for its ethnic and cultural diversity. Out of the 101 castes and ethnic groups, Magars constitute a significant ethnic group, as the third largest population. Indeed, among the 59 *Adibasi-Janajati* groups, Magar is the largest group. Magars are mainly settled in the west hills, although they can be found throughout the country. They are a well-known ethnic group due to their popular political history and distinct ethnic values based on identity, language and culture. This ethnic group has the primordial considerations that espouse from those of other caste and ethnic groups. Dhut, Kham and Kaike, the best known Magar languages are much in use in the west hills, which the Magar claim as a Magarant region. Among these languages, first represents the *Barha Magarant* while the latter two are found in the *Athar Magarant* regions, for southern and northern Magars respectively. Hence, Magars themselves are also diverse in terms of their language, religion, culture, clan and territorial identities. Indeed, these identities differ from one hamlet or village to the next. Moreover, from north to south, Magars have seven clans, namely Thapa, Rana, Aale, Pun, Budha, Rokka and Gharti, and within these major clans there are around a thousand sub-clans and titles. Their settlement patterns are quite interesting. Among the seven clans, the previous three are found largely in the *Barha Magarant* while the rest are significantly settled in the *Athar Magarant*. In spite of some underlying differences, the life-style, rituals and culture, Magars are very similar and manifestly come from Magarant areas. The cultural divisions have, in fact, more to do with ancestry customs and local geographical and social diversities than with the fact of belonging to different clans. However, Magars have a rich culture, their own ethnic identity, language and religious practices based on Animism and Shamanism. But their culture and traditions are highly influenced by the Hindu religion and Nepali language.

The Magars used to have their own ruling system throughout several chiefdoms, in the form of village-level authorities in part of their *Magarant* territory. But they gradually lost their ruling power around 12th to 14th century due to the migration of the Rajput ruler from northern India to *Barha Magarant* and increasing power of the *Khas* Chhetri from western Khasan in the *Athar Magarant*. According to political history, Magars significantly contributed to the creation of the Nepali state, before and after the national unification of 1768. The Great unification established one state. Under the unification, the Nepali language and Hindu religion imposed by the Rajput and Khas warriors, irrespective of different cultures and languages of ethnic groups and others, gave rise to the systematic exclusion of these groups from the polity of the state. Therefore, not only the Magars lost their ruling

power, but also their language and culture suffered due to the priority given to the Khas-Nepali language and Hindu culture by the authoritarian rulers of the high caste hill group. The bitterness of such experiences, along with marginalisation in the polity of the state perhaps goes some way to explaining the subsequent rise of an assertive Magar ethnic movement. Thus, with the advent of democracy in 1990, ethnic activism has gained more importance with the proliferation of ethnic organisations in an atmosphere conducive to liberal ideas and basic human rights. Since then, Magars and other ethnic groups have been decisively promoting their interests through ethnic activism in order to seek rational participation in state affairs and safeguard their distinct ethnic identity.

Political socialisation has important role in recruiting and designating the people in politics. Hence, the various agents of political socialisation (mainly education, economy and political ecology) and democratic institutions play decisive roles in connecting people and promoting their political attitudes. Almost all Magar activists believe that Magars have been marginalised and underprivileged in politics and state affairs because of the exclusionary nature of the state and inadequate political socialisation. Therefore, relative to other major ethnic and high caste groups, the Magars' participation in state affairs is either negligible or nil in proportion to the size of their population. Besides the exclusionary nature of the state, Magar commoners perceive some other reasons for their marginalisation. Education and socio-political awareness which to a large extent determine peoples' involvement in politics are not tolerably found among the Magars, who therefore, play only a small role in the state polity. Likewise, the disintegration of the Magar ethnic group in terms of geography, language and culture also seems to be a likely reason for explaining why they lack political strength. The ethnic identity of the *Barha* and *Athar Magarant* as the southern and northern Magar through historical perspective as well as their attachment and isolation with the Nepali state respectively is also seen as a factor for fragmenting their strong unity. Magars from isolated regions, particularly from the *Athar Magarant*, have succeeded in articulating their grievances through participation in the Maoist insurgency (1995-2005). The Magars got involved in the Maoist war in order to seek Magar ethnic autonomy. Ethnic activism of Magar organisations to regain their ethnic identities has helped to recognise the Magars as a marginal and underprivileged group on the one hand, and on the other it has helped to spread its ethnic values throughout the country and abroad.

With the aim of strengthening ethnic identity and solidarity, Magar ethnic activism in Nepal formally started in the early 1980s with the Langhali Pariwar and then with the NMA in 1992. Activists from student and ex-army backgrounds (retired British-Gorkha or Indian army service), or their family members lay down the foundation of Magar activism. Activism led by the NMA has spread among Magars in various districts and at the local level through preliminary committees. In comparison to the situation in Palpa and Myagdi, Magar activism

in Kaski has been very popular in terms of Magar mobilisation and collection of physical property. Since the 1990s, the Magars have tried to organise themselves in many forms, both to preserve their culture and language and also to demand more ethnic and political rights, articulating their grievances as a marginalised sector of the population. Through activism they have more or less succeeded in promoting their language, religion and culture as the primordial consideration. So far as religion is concerned, most of their aboriginal practices are more or less influenced by the Hindus. Therefore, some of them are now trying to go back to their old beliefs and rituals, such as shamanism and animism, or are adopting a new religion, i.e. Buddhism, rejecting the Hinduism in urban centers. Their activism on religion prevailed more during the 2001 census period. Nonetheless, Magar activism has faced challenges in its campaign to return the Magar people to their aboriginal cultural practices due to the extent of Sanskritisation and Hinduisation on the one hand, and modernisation, urbanisation, and globalisation on the other.

Political awareness and consciousness can only be raised through political education and mobilisation. Such awareness occurred in most of the Magar settlements because of different local level organisations and political parties. Magar people at the local level think that a democratic system is needed for freedom and equality in the political, social, and economic sectors of society and the state. Moreover, democracy inherently appeals to them in their daily life, as they do not want any type of value imposed by either the state or the non-state level. Undoubtedly, the positive effects of democracy that have been achieved in post-1990 Nepal and more so, after the April (2006) movement, are paths towards an inclusive political culture and the consolidation of the consociational democracy. Likewise, Maoist war has also significantly contributed to the dissemination of political knowledge and ethnic rights among the Magars and other ethnic strata of the population. Therefore, the value of ethnic autonomy and the right to self-determination is increasingly recognised by the ethnic strata of population at a local level. In a democracy, citizens' political knowledge is power, in terms of the formation of political culture and participation in politics. In this regard, activists of political parties and ethnic organisations are crucial agents of political socialisation who disseminate the values of state and political rights.

Although Magars contributed substantially to the unification of Nepal, they themselves as a group, particularly since the fall of the Rana regime, have become increasingly marginalised in terms of authority. They have been excluded from the polity of the state not only in the autocratic Rana and Panchayat system but also in the post 1990 democracy era. However, the ecological atmosphere created in and after the *janandolan* I and II favoured the articulation and integration of ethnic demands from the excluded and marginal sectors of society. Hence, it encouraged the ethnic commoners to seek their proper role in the polity of the state and to promote their ethnic identity. It is hoped that many excluded groups like

the Magars will receive significant representation in the decision-making process, and the resources and power of the state through the inclusive democratic process of state restructuring, as initiated by the Constituent Assembly. The election for the CA was held particularly through the PR system in order to represent as much as possible from the ethnic groups which was mentioned in the agreement between state and ethnic organisations. Hence, the CA was formed due to the result of the comprehensive peace agreement between state and the Maoists, in order to resolve the ethno-political conflict and Maoist insurgency respectively.

Undoubtedly, democratic institutions such as political parties and ethnic organisations are decisive factors in raising peoples' awareness of ethnic values and their role in politics. Magar organisations tend to be limited to the urban centres whereas political parties, through extensive mobilisation of their units and activists, have succeeded in increasing awareness among the people in the villages. Due to mobilisation by parties, especially by the Maoists, the Magar commoners in the villages are politically educated rather than the people in the urban sectors. This is partly because the Magars who are settled in the urban area are mostly ex-British/Indian armies and have migrated from their rural villages. Consequently, they have been separated from the social and political values of their community. Although they are financially well off, they are reluctant to get involved in politics, partly due to their frequent living abroad and partly due to the lack of proper education and political awareness. Therefore, particularly in urban centres, education and socialisation, rather than economic standards, appear to be the key factors for Magar participation in politics. On the other hand when some Magars living in villages are struggling for their survival, no one can expect their promotion of political knowledge and active role in politics. For their positive perception and active performance in politics, they should be privileged with the basic needs through facilities of economy, health and education. They have perceived that democracy is the only way through which the re-structured state can provide all facilities for the betterment of their life. However, Magar people have positive attitudes towards democracy and some of them significantly participated in the April (2006) revolution. They don't see any alternative to democracy in terms of the welfare of state and their society. The majority of them understand democracy in the aggregative and deliberative sense that is, as the guarantee of basic human and inherent ethnic rights, periodic election, accountable governance, social welfare and inclusion in polity. Likewise, Magars are able to discard the undemocratic performance; therefore, they could not accept the century long monarchy in the price of democracy. Their interfaces with democracy reveal that Magars are pro-democratic and are very eager to see peace and development instead of conflict and violence. Hence, they perceive democracy as its inclusive and consociational form, a means to resolve the ethnic and political conflict in the state.

The NEFIN, NMA and other Magar ethnic organisations have greatly contributed to ethnic revitalisation and activism that aims to raise ethnic and political awareness among the Magars in general. Due to the extensive reach of political parties relative to ethnic organisations, Magars are more closely affiliated with political ideology rather than with ethnic values. Likewise, political mobilisation throughout a decade-long Maoist war and the 19 days *Janandolan-II* significantly promoted and enhanced their political knowledge. Beyond these factors, local institutions and organisations at a grass-roots level, such as user groups, mother groups, CBOs, NGOs and others, also aim to spread knowledge among the people through political socialisation. Hence, in order to disseminate modern values, both formal and informal means of communication, teachers, and social and political activists are regarded as the popular agents of change in the Magars' pastoral life. However, the mobilisation of the ways in which people produce and reproduce their ethnic, cultural and social relationship through ethnic, social and political organisations, and the ways in which such organisations are connected with larger political and social movements to engage people in decision-making processes, can provide the Magar at a general level with an understanding of alternative processes for pursuing their interests in democratic politics. Indeed, such processes can assist in strengthening the democratisation of politics and the institutionalisation of democracy in the state.

On the other hand, democracy itself needs to adopt a more inclusive form and develop welfare capabilities in order to recognise the multi-ethnic and multicultural character of the state which cannot operate normally through traditional liberal democracy. According to the traditional liberal perspective, democracy has narrowly been defined as the rule of the majority, chosen in regular elections. However, in multiethnic and heterogeneous societies, not every group is involved in the process of decision-making due to the unitary form of the state and the exclusionary nature of institutional practices like the first-past-the post system. On the contrary, in multiethnic countries, through this method, only a few elite from the dominant group control authority and resources, which means that subordinate groups do not have an adequate say in the state affairs, and large segments of ethnic and other minority groups are excluded and marginalised. Hence, most of the Magar activists conclude that their ethnic identities are in crisis due to the domination of Nepali language and Hindu culture on the one hand and not getting proper representation in the power and resources of the state on the other. Therefore, political and ethnic conflicts occur time to time in Nepali democracy. In order to resolve this, an improved democracy is necessary; one that is precise, inclusive, participatory and strong. Democracy would be meaningful when all strata of population, irrespective of any discrimination, have an access to the resources and affairs of the state. This is why in multiculturalism; inclusive democracy applies in terms of consensus through consociationalism or power sharing, instead of hegemony and monopoly-ruling by a few elites from the dominant group. It is the hegemonic domination by elite over

resources and power of the state and their exclusionary approach towards ethnic demands as well as not improper management over the ethnic pluralism that ultimately, sharpens the edges of the ethnic conflict and turmoil.

In pluralism, political parties are supposed to be the vanguard of democracy. Such positive beliefs are found among the Magars too. They believe that the parties play a decisive role in strengthening and institutionalising democracy. Although party politics was established with the advent of democracy in 1950, the popularity of democracy has significantly increased at a grass-roots level since its re-establishment in 1990. Moreover, the *janandolan-II* in 2006 once again proved that democracy and political parties are inherently linked with Nepali people. Ideologies and principles, along with the practical activities of political parties play an influential role in mobilising people politically in democracy. In addition to these, Magars at the local level identify political socialisation through principle, activities and leaders of the parties. Formal and informal local relations and family backgrounds are also major factors in determining the interfaces between people and political ideology. In this regard, relative to centrist and rightist forces, the left parties are much better placed among the Magars to influence their political perceptions. Left parties, particularly the Maoists, have strategically or rationally succeeded in connecting peoples' expectations and grievances with the political ideology. Therefore, since a few years ago Maoists and its political wing for Magar people, MNLF have been increasing its popularity among this ethnic group although the UML, another left party, was found popular some years before among the Magar in general. However, people's attachment to various political parties ultimately tends to favour an ecological atmosphere for flourishing different ideologies and values in democracy. At a local level, Magars are more associated with political parties than with their own ethnic organisation due to the absence or lack of such organisations at this level. Therefore, most of the activists at the grassroots level are guided by their affiliated political parties' ideology than by ethnic (Magar) identity. However, as party members or strong supporters, Magars' affiliation with the political parties seems an effective means of interlinking party politics and democracy. Magars at the grass-roots level believe that political parties are vanguards of democracy and the chief agents of democratisation and political mobilisation. These perceptions and practices are often promoting institutionalisation of party politics through which political parties and democracy can successfully operate.

Although the state discarded the closed system and entered into open democracy with the provision of basic human rights in 1990, the parliamentary parties which had previously been ruling over the state could not fulfill the demands and expectations of people on the one hand and could not manage misgovernance and corruption on the other. On these grounds, the Maoists began the armed insurgency along with catalyzing the grievances of people from excluded strata and isolated regions. After two years of insurgency, the Maoists

strategically established various ethnic wings, including the MNLF, to encourage the involvement of the ethnic population in Maoist politics. Likewise, Magars, particularly from the west Kham hills, have significantly contributed to the Maoist war through recruitment in the PLA. Some Magars, mainly those who have been socialised through the MNLF and the Maoists, perceive positively that they will have ruling power in their own ethnic Magarant territory and access to resources. Therefore, they support the Maoist mission for holding the country though others do not believe that the Maoists will support their emancipation. On the other side, some activists believe that the Maoists have strategically adopted the fascinated slogan of 'ethnic (Magar) autonomy' in order to catalyse the Magars' sentiments and support their mission to gain power over the state. Likewise, some of them ignored the Maoists because of their brutality towards ordinary people and their irrational so-called *janakarbhai* over those who oppose or criticise them whether by policy or by actions.

In accordance with the attitudes of the Magars at the local level the Maoist war spread throughout many rural parts because of the exclusionary nature of the state and the fact that unemployment and poverty are common in these areas. The contemporary political environment created an atmosphere which manifestly and latently favoured the Maoists' search for power and control over the country though these are the ultimate goal of all political party. Therefore, most of the respondents argued that the Maoist conflict could be resolved by providing them with a significant role in state authority and stress that a coalition government of all mainstream political parties represents the best means for promoting peace, development and prosperity in the country.

In a democracy, the grievances and articulation of marginalised and excluded people spring up through the support and integration of demands by political parties, pressure groups and civil society. Due to the exclusionary and centralised character of the state of Nepal, various ethnic and regional groups have been, for some years, calling for inclusion in state power and resources. In the multiethnic and multiculturalism, federal policy may only be tempted to recognise this wider cultural variety and to resolve ethnic and regional conflicts. Along with failing to recognise the diverse geography and multicultural heritage of Nepal, the constitutional experiences gained over the last fifty years have not been seen in favour of allocating equitable representation in decision-making bodies or the fair distribution of resources of the state. Therefore, several ethnic forces have demanded ethnic federalism and local autonomy in order to address its geographical, ethnic and cultural diversity and break its traditional, feudal and centralised structure, and the dominated by high caste hill elite. Indeed, restructuring the Nepali state, particularly for democratic inclusion and federalism may develop the political culture in terms of a power consensus in democratic consociationalism between diverse political and ethnic forces. Hence, according to Magars at the local level, only through such process, most of the existing ethnic and regional

conflicts will be resolved. Nevertheless, political parties and ethnic organisations need to rethink the demands of ethnic federalism in terms of the right to self-determination because there is no single ethnic group that holds the majority in the proposed units of state. And, if inclusion is to be a reality, then no group can be excluded from the polity in the future. In addition to this, no single unit of territory, such as a province or federal structure, can survive independently without cooperation and close relationship with other units, due to the inextricable connections between political demography, geographical structure and eco-cultural characteristics in Nepalese society. However, ethnic conflicts can only be resolved through fair representation in the polity, along with the guarantee of ethnic rights and identity. In this regard, we can clearly see that the Magars believe that the PR system represents the best solution to ethnic and political conflict, as it is based on rational division of the state into federal provinces for self rule by the people.

It is necessary to restructure the state through inclusive democracy in order to increase proper participation in state affairs and to address the diverse ethnic and cultural identities of the subordinate and marginal strata of the population rather than organise the federal units only. Thus, the Nepali state needs proper management of ethnic conflict through the creation of policies which will empower the disadvantaged and subordinate people in the polity. Hence, almost all Magars at the local level believe that the people will be sovereign and will benefit from democracy, and their ethnic and territorial diversities will be respected, if the policies, power and resources of the state are devolved to local governance. The devolution of power and resources from central authority to local units will undoubtedly consolidate democracy by encouraging political participation at the grass-roots level. Moreover, it will launch the country on a new phase of nation-building, as well as ensuring recognition of multicultural identities and the empowerment of the people. On the other hand, most of the political and ethnic forces have preferred federalism in order to apply power sharing in a democracy as consociationalism, thus breaking the unitary state and its domination by the traditional elite. Therefore, at least two levels of autonomous government, the federal provinces at the regional level and local units of governances at the grass-roots level are required in order so that power, resources and the decision-making authority devolve from the central to the local level. Nepal's diverse ethno-demography and geography call for a combination which will enable interaction between the different levels of government and will produce a system in which people and ethnic group are empowered with avenues for the expression of different ethnic and territorial identities. However, restructuring through federated provinces and local government indeed promotes consensual democracy through a system of "check and balance" over centralising and authoritative tendencies. For this to happen, the devolution of power and jurisdiction along with the rights and duties of central, federal and local government, should all be clearly mentioned in the new constitution of Nepal.

It is predicted that restructuring the state into several units based on a democratic consociational arrangement will assist in resolving ethnic cleavages through distributing and sharing power and resources among the many groups in multicultural Nepal. Furthermore, given that institutional designs are the expression of the state's power structure and nature of political participation. The new designs are now needed in Nepal since the conventional models have failed to resolve or manage its ethnic conflict. Undoubtedly, if a society has deep ethnic cleavages, then democracy is inherently difficult. Many events in contemporary politics, particularly in multiethnic countries seem to support the view that the scale of ethnic conflict is closely related to the degree of democracy; and the institutional arrangements, such as how these ethnic cleavages are managed, are keys to the success or failure of the democratic process. Based on this premise, the proposition is that the distribution of power resources among ethnic groups shapes the institutional arrangements, which, in turn, affect the final democratic performance of the state.

Nepal is now turning towards state restructuring through the Constituent Assembly, in order to include underprivileged, deprived and marginalised groups and regions in the exercise of power and the utilisation of resources of the state. The Magar Association and NEFIN have focused their agenda on the matter of proportional representation for caste and ethnic groups; reasonable representation in state affairs, and ethnic autonomy for political empowerment. Until now, the majority of Magar people at the local level, both activists and non-activists, favour rational representation in polity in terms of relative population size of each caste and ethnic group, and federal structure of the state based on geographical, economic, ethnic and cultural diversity. Likewise, those who strongly favoured the ethnic Magarant province with the right to self-determination, they expect that ethnic and cultural rights will be officially recognised in their regions though they want full ethnic autonomy. Hence, most of them strongly oppose the right to alienation whether it is on the ground of ethnicity or region in terms of federal units. However, through their organisations, Magars played a significant role in the democratic movement (Janandolan –II) and since then they have been demanding a proportional role in the polity and state affairs according to their ethnic identity. This will be possible only when traditional liberal democracy is transformed into an inclusive form of consociational democracy, in which all segments of population enjoy state's power and resources instead of a monopoly from the traditional ruling class and caste group. In a multicultural and multiethnic country like Nepal, the politics of hegemony by one group has a negative effect on democracy. Therefore, the ruling traditional elites as the high hill caste group must give space to the marginal and subordinate ethnic groups including Magars so that they will be able to access power and resources of the state in order to resolve the ethnic conflict properly and rationally. If the subordinate ethnic groups increase their

power then democracy is more likely to succeed, and conversely, if the dominant group increases its power, then it is more likely that prospects for democracy are diminished.

In Nepal, with its extreme ethnic diversity, the control over power resources by the conventional elites from the dominant high caste hill group hinders democracy, whereas the dispersion of resource among the various power-seeking ethnic groups would clearly facilitate the democratic process. Hence, the forms of ethnic conflict and its mobilisation basically depend on the deal and the management of power holders in the state. Regarding this, through federalism and local autonomy or any other means of different power arrangement, ethnic groups like the Magars and others will control power and resources of the state. In the process of restructuring the state adopting with more inclusive institutional designs, such as those mentioned above, proportional representation and reservation are also effective means of resolving the ethnic and regional conflicts. In conventional liberal democracy, read as majoritarian rule, the dominant group has monopolised in using the authority and resources of the state. But in consociational democracy with a power consensus, excluded, unprivileged and minority ethnic groups are included and are regarded as active participants in the multiethnic and multicultural state. Therefore, as advocated by institutionalists, in a multiethnic country, institutional engineering can influence the prospects for democracy in terms of resolving ethnic conflicts through a rational and inclusive process of consociationalism. Thus, along with addressing the grievances and cleavages of ethnic and other marginal voices, hopefully the CA will design institutional practices and political units through which all groups irrespective of any discrimination, will gain access to power resources and participate in the decision-making processes of the state. This is not only an effective means for resolving the ongoing grievances and cleavages in the contemporary ethnic politics of Nepal, but also a way for beginning of institutionalising multicultural democracy and ensuring that the real nation building process has just started.

The overall findings of this study can be recapitulated below.

1. Magars seem to be the richest ethnic group in terms of historical identity, language and culture. Although the influence of Hinduism can be significantly found in their religious and cultural life; Magars have their own ethnic identity, espouse distinct traditional customs based on animism-shamanism and practice of Dhut, Kham and Kaike as Magar languages. This ethnicity has unique social structure and egalitarian horizontal relation that differ from hierarchical division of Varna or caste system. Magars themselves supposed that they have different

written or oral histories that trace their line of descent back to the occupants of their territories in west hills predating their annexation into present-day Nepal. By their indigenous and ethnic characteristics they deserve to be an indigenous-nationality, therefore it is included formerly in the list of *adivasis/janajatis*, recognised by the government of Nepal.

2. The oral history that existed among the Magars concerning their own political entity reveals that they had the chiefdoms for ruling by themselves. This system gradually disappeared and merged with the territories of the Baise-Chaubise principalities that were established in the initiation of the Rajput Thakuri and Khas in and around twelve and fifteen century respectively. Magars, particularly from the Baise territory as they supposed the Barha Magarant had significantly contributed to build the greater Nepal. Therefore, they had the significant ruling position during the assertive monarchy of Shah Dynasty before Rana rule.
3. Since the Rana rule, the Magars have been marginalized and disadvantaged in the mainstream polity of the state. Although they are one of the major ethnic groups today, the caste and ethnic composition in the decision making level of the state reveals that the Magars have nominal representation. Most of the activists perceive that they are marginalised in the polity of the state due to its exclusionary nature, whereas, some of the Magars think that the lack of educational and political awareness also the factors for their less representation in the state affairs.
4. Magars initiated some sort of insurgency against the tyrannical regime and established the people's rights. In this context, the first hero called Lakhan Thapa Magar's revolt against the Rana regime and their active involvement in the Maoist arms revolution demonstrated their anti-established movement against the traditional state.
5. So far the history of the Magar ethnic activism is concerned, it can be traced back to the Rana regime. However, it formerly started under the Langhali Pariwar in the early 1980s and then under the NMA since 1992. The main demand of their activism in the post 1990 era was to seek recognition and promote their primordial ethnic identity. Hence, the Magar ethnic organisations have turned to its agendas of proportional representation system and federalism for seeking inclusive democracy through their activism in the post *janandolan* II (April-2006 revolution) era.
6. Although, different Magar organisations are found active among the Magars in Kaski, Palpa and Myagdi districts, the NMA is the major part of their activism and the oldest in relation to other Magar organisations. Among the

three districts, their activism has succeeded in mobilising the Magars at the grass roots level with the NMA becoming more active in Kaski rather than Myagdi and Palpa. It is because, the activists from good economic and intellectual background in Kaski have devoted their time to organise and promote the Magar identity since they migrated and remained an ethnic minority in this place. In order to organise and mobilise the Pun people the separate organisation called PS is found more active in Kaski, whereas during the study this organisation is not found in Myagdi and Palpa. It seems that principle of necessarily fuelled their activism towards solidarity and unity for their identity. As a recent phenomenon, the identity politics is found to be the major end of the Magar activism. Since some years ago, particularly with the April revolution, Magars have been socialising through political ideologies of various sister organisations which are associated with different political parties, among them MNLF as a sister wing of the Maoist party is more active among the Magars. However, through various activities Magar organisations in Kaski, Myagdi and Palpa have succeeded in increasing the ethnic awareness among the Magars in general.

7. It is an interesting to see that Magars have tried to change their status by assimilating their culture through Sanskritisation and Hinduisation as well as modernisation and globalisation, and by giving up their old practices in the early history of their activism. On the other hand, some activists, particularly during and after the census of 2001, are trying to go back to their old beliefs and rituals, such as shamanism and animism, or are adopting a new religion, i.e. Buddhism, rejecting Hinduism. Therefore, compared to the commoners, it is found that the activists like to stay non-Hindu. Likewise, due to language revitalisation, some Magars at the local level use their mother tongue and some others are eager to know the language. Regarding their activism, the agenda of identity politics is more effective in post April revolution. Therefore, primordial as well as instrumental perspectives are more relevant with the study of the Magar ethnicity and their activism.
8. It is found that due to activism of various local level organisations, the Magar people in villages are politically educated compared to other counterparts in the urban sectors. Most of the people have positive attitudes towards democracy, consequently, some actively participated in the April (2006) revolution. Those who were active in the revolution state that the request made by political parties and the Maoist followed by their ethnic organisation were the inspiring causes for their participation in the democratic movement. It is also found that the negotiation before the revolution which was conducted in between seven parties' alliance and the Maoist was the crucial background for their positive beliefs on democracy. People have much expectation from democracy and most of the activists believed that democracy and its inclusive form is only the way to resolve ethnic and other conflicts. It seems that almost all Magars at local level want to see effective

performance of democracy as peace, stability and development along with more inclusiveness for marginalized ethnic and other excluded minority groups.

9. In Magar understanding people's government, human rights, peace, development, rule of law and inclusion in the polity are the aggregative and deliberative meaning of democracy. Magars and Democracy interfaces positively, therefore, most of them perceive that it is needed for the society and state through which they could fulfil their parochial as well as wider expectations. The Maoists' war and mobilisation in democratic movement (April, 2006) helped the Magars to increase and extend their knowledge on democracy and ethnic values. They considered democracy more valuable than Monarchy and the king. As a result, along with other many sectors of the Nepali society, their efforts succeeded in establishing a secular and republic state.
10. The political parties, Magar organisations as well as traditional and community based organisations are found active among the Magar communities. These institutions bridge the gaps in between state and community as well as democracy and Magar people at the grassroots level. The activism conducted by these organisations not only produce their ethnic, cultural, social and political awareness and relationships, but also create avenues to connect with larger political and social movements to engage people in the decision making process. As the power seeker group, Magars understand an alternative process of democratisation in politics. That is democratic inclusion through which it is expected that the ethnic and other conflicts are resolved with the consensus between the dominant and subordinate groups. Undoubtedly, such processes of consociational democracy can help to strengthen multiculturalism and identity politics.
11. The democracy in 1990 and 2006 have several achievements, for instance Magars have acquainted themselves with democratic norms and values on the one hand and on the other it proved that democracy and political parties have become vital to the Nepali people. Moreover, through their significant affiliation with political parties and its ideologies, Magars support multi-party democracy. Political parties and the activists, who promote their ideologies and principles for the welfare of the state and its people, play the decisive role in the mobilisation of people in politics. How people in general perceive the government of a distinct party is also a factor that determines their political choices.
12. Political socialisation through education, economy and family backgrounds are the major factors that influence people in their attitudes as well as their role towards party ideology and politics. In this regard, it is found that relative to the centrist and rightist forces, left parties are in a much better

position among the Magars through their careful management of political perceptions, which have strategically or rationally succeeded in interconnecting peoples' expectations or grievances and political ideologies. Hence, the Maoist is emerging as the popular party among the Magars compared to the UML which was the first choice some years ago.

13. The study also finds that Magars are more involved in party politics compared to their ethnic organisations that are limited in a few urban centers. However, their inclination towards party politics ultimately helps to flourish different ideologies and values in democracy. Almost all the Magars at the grass-roots level oppose the undemocratic functions that have been performed by the parties in the past as well as present. Nevertheless, they believe that political parties are the vanguard of democracy and the chief agents of democratisation and political mobilisation which bridge them to the state.
14. CPN-Maoist is one of the major political parties which believed in the ideologies of Marxism, Leninism and Maoism and launched the Peoples' War in February-1996 and two years later MNLF was established for mobilising the Magars at the grass roots in the war. Those who were affiliated with and influence by the Maoist and MNLF, perceived that Maoist party and MNLF are the way for their emancipation with establishing the Magarant autonomy through which the Magar culture and society will prosper and progress. Some others believed that these are the effective tools relatively with other forces in order to change the society and their life. Whereas, those who opposed these organisations, argued that they could do nothing for the people at the grass roots level but catalyze the grievances of the Magar ethnic group and their interest in gaining power.
15. To address the multicultural and geographical diversities and the grievances of the marginalised and excluded people, federalism paves the way for collective resolution of ongoing ethnic and regional conflict. According to the Magars at the grass roots level, ethnic conflicts can only be resolved through fair representation in the polity and access to power and resources of the state along with the guarantee of their ethnic rights and identity. In this regard, it is found that Magarant with the right to self determination was the major demand of the Maoist and MNLF, therefore, most of the Magars in the dominant regions of these organisations seemed to support this demand. It is also found that as the Magar activists, they prefer the Magarant ethnic province, but in view with the sustainable peace and tranquility some of them suggest that federalism based on different characteristics of the society would be the moderate and rational resolution of the ethnic and regional conflicts. Almost all believe that the Proportional Representation system based on the strength of each group of population and provision of some basic ethnic rights with their identity in a given federal province is the best institutional design for resolving the ethnic

conflict. As the recent achievement in ethnic politics, it seems that almost all political and social Magar organisations are united through Common Magar Forum for seeking the Magarant province through CA. Therefore, those activists who were not in favour of Magarant a few years ago are now found lobbying for Magarant ethnic province although Magars are not in the majority in such proposed Magarant.

16. The restructuring of the state and inclusive democracy are needed to address the interests of the local people and their diverse identities. Therefore, the Magars in villages perceive that the power and resources of the state should be devolved to people at the grass-roots level as per the ethnic and geographic diversity of the country. For this, they suggest that at least two levels of autonomous governments - the federal provinces at the regional level and local units of governments at the grassroots level - should be mentioned along with the devolution of power, resources and decision-making authority through a new constitution.

Appendix - 1

Classification of *Adivasis/janajatis*

Table No. 1.1

Geographical division

<u>Mountain Region</u>	Walung, Topkegola (Dhokpya), Thudam, Lhomi (Singsawa), Sherpa, Larke (Nupriba), Siyar (Chumba), Barha Gaunle, Tangbe, Thakali, Marphali Thakali, Tin Gaunle Thakali, Chhairotan, Dolpo, Lhopa, Mugali, Bhote, and Byansi.
<u>Hill Region</u>	Limbu, Lepcha, Yakkha, Rai, Sunuwar, Hayu, Jirel, Thami, Sural, Tamang, Yholmo, Pahari, Newar, Bankariya, Chepang, Phree, Baramo, Kusunda, Bhujel, Gurung, Dura, Chhantyal, Magar, and Raute.
<u>Inner Tarai</u>	Majhi, Danuwar, Bote, Darai, Kumal, and Raji.
<u>Tarai</u>	Meche (Bodo), Kisan, Satar (Santhal), Rajbansi (Koch), Tajpuria, Dhimal, Gangain, Jhangad, Dhanuk (Rajbansi), Tharu, Kushbadiya, and (Kuhabadiya/ Pattharkatt)

Source: The National Foundation for Uplift of *Adivasi/Janajatis* Act, 2002 (*adivasis/janajati Utthan Rastriya Prastisthan Ain, 2058*) (Appendix)

Table No. 1.2

Classification on the ground of accessibility to state, social prestige and human development

i) Endangered:
1. Bankaria, 2. Kushaunda, 3. Kushbalia, 4. Raute, 5. Sural, 6. Hayu, 7. Raji, 8. Kisan, 9. Lepcha, and 10. Meche.
ii) Disadvantaged adivasis/Janajatis:
1. Chepang, 2. Thami, 3. Majhi, 4. Bote, 5. Jirel, 6. Larke (Nutriba), 7. Siyar (Chumba), 8. Tangbe, 9. Walung, 10. Topkegola, 11. Thudam, 12. Dolpo, 13. Bhote, 14. Limbu, 15. Lhopa, 16. Mugali, 17. Yholmo, 18. Limbu, 19. Yakkha, 20. Rai, 21. Sunuwar, 22. Tamang, 23. Pahari, 24. Pheree, 25. Baramo, 26. Bhujel, 27. Dura, 28. Chhantyal, 29. Magar, 30. Daraj, 31. Danuwar, 32. Kumal, 33. Santhal, 34. Rajbansi, 35. Tajpuria, 36. Dhimal, 37. Gangai, 38. Jhangar, 39. Tharu, 40. Dhanuk (Rajbansi), 41. Chairotan, 42. Tin Gaule, 43. Barah Gaule, 44. Byansi, 45. Gurung, 46. Marphali Thakali, and 47. Sherpa.
iii) Advanced Adivasis/janajatis: 1. Newar, and 2. Thakali.

Source: IIDS 2002, 2002: 76-77

Appendix - 2

Table 2.1

Magar population and Magar speakers in Nepal

(in accordance with 2001 Census)

Development Region	Zone	District	Total VDC	VDC with Magar Population	Total Population	Magar Population	Total Magar Speaker
1. Eastern Dev. Region	1. Mechi	1. Taplejung	50	15	133,727	1,270	539
		2. Panther	41	31	201,729	6,370	6,025
		3. Ilam	49	46	281,678	12,719	9,189
		4. Jhapa	49	46	632,177	13,507	8,101
		Total	189	138	1,249,311	33,866	23,854
	2. Koshi	1. Morang	66	54	842,507	22,240	18,061
		2. Sunsari	52	32	623,226	8,741	6,607
		3. Dhankuta	36	32	165,069	16,094	14,722
		4. Therathum	32	16	113,061	2,427	2,288
		5. Sankhuwashaba	34	17	159,007	5,006	3,902
		6. Bhujapur	63	37	202,576	8,441	6,258
		Total	283	188	2,105,446	62,949	51,838
	3. Sagarmatha	1. Solukhumbu	34	21	107,211	4,917	598
		2. OkhalDhunga	56	44	155,255	15,775	12,157
		3. Khotang	76	47	230,898	9,849	7,729
		4. Udayapur	45	45	286,683	39,651	34,458
		5. Saptari	115	20	569,812	2,328	1,541
		6. Siraha	108	21	569,686	7,015	5,279
		Total	434	198	1,919,545	79,535	61,762
Total			906	524	5,274,302	176,350	137,454
2. Central Dev. Region	1. Janakpur	1. Dhnusha	102	22	670,825	2,894	5,450
		2. Mahottari	77	14	552,892	14,115	11,604
		3. Sarlahi	100	29	635,667	14,280	7,477
		4. Sindhuli	54	53	276,941	39,656	23,022
		5. Ramedhap	55	50	214,824	23,474	14,756
		6. Dolakha	49	28	173,581	3,477	689
		Total	437	196	2,524,730	97,896	62,998
	2. Bagmati	1. Sindhupalchok	78	49	293,083	4,479	133

		2. Kavre	90	60	383,389	13,354	1,878
		3. Lalitpur	42	28	344,109	11,416	3,337
		4. Bhaktapur	18	16	224,503	3,571	728
		5. Kathmandu	59	49	1,063,721	33,495	11,177
		6. Nuwakot	62	35	282,887	6,405	355
		7. Rasuwa	18	8	43,906	507	66
		8. Dhading	50	46	337,478	28,613	8,045
		Total	417	291	2,973,076	101,840	25,719

	3. Narayani	1. Makwanpur	45	41	392,604	17,939	3,390
		2. Rautahat	97	11	540,981	3,994	695
		3. Bara	98	17	553,562	5,346	3,053
		4. Parsa	83	16	495,380	2,087	861
		5. Chitwan	39	39	472,048	19,643	7,227
		Total	362	124	2,454,575	49,009	15,226
Total			1,216	611	7,952,381	248,745	103,943
3. Western Dev. Region	1. Gandaki	1. Gorkha	67	46	288,134	32,662	13,465
		2. Lamjung	61	38	177,149	3,595	1,865
		3. Tanahun	47	47	315,237	84,332	67,723
		4. Syangja	62	53	315,321	67,140	53,226
		5. Kaski	45	38	380,527	23,509	6,273
		6. Manang	13	5	9,587	86	44
		Total	295	227	1,485,955	211,324	142,596
	2. Dhaulagiri	1. Mustang	16	13	14,981	934	156
		2. Myagdi	40	40	114,447	47,820	16,986
		3. Parbat	55	44	157,826	16,919	8,742
		4. Baglung	60	60	268,937	74,550	21,364
		Total	171	157	556,191	140,223	47,248
	3. Lumbini	1. Gulmi	79	73	296,654	59,166	9,745
		2. Palpa	66	66	268,558	136,750	88,906
		3. Nawalparasi	74	62	562,870	96,874	80,071
		4. Rupandhihi	71	43	708,419	62,200	23,565
		5. Kapilwastu	78	32	481,976	10,241	2,892
		6. Arghakhanchhi	42	39	208,391	34,073	4,933
		Total	410	315	2,526,868	399,304	210,112
Total			876	699	4,569,014	750,851	399,956
4. Mid-Western Dev. Region	1. Rapti	1. Pyuthan	49	49	212,484	65,123	5,530
		2. Rolpa	51	51	210,004	91,936	38,155
		3. Rukum	43	40	188,438	43,621	13,489
		4. Salyan	19	18	60,643	10,445	27
		5. Dang	41	41	462,380	55,711	7,873
		Total	203	199	1,133,949	266,836	65,074
	2. Bheri	1. Banke	47	38	385,840	20,905	5,635
		2. Bardiya	32	32	382,649	10,767	2,793
		3. surkhet	48	48	269,870	55,668	15,588
		4. Dailekha	56	35	225,201	22,222	4,158
		5. Jajarkot	30	26	134,868	11,721	1,213

		Total	213	179	1,398,428	121,283	29,387
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	3. Karnali	1. Dolpa	18	16	22,071	2,810	3,958
		2. Jumla	28	4	69,226	105	-
		3. Kalikot	3	2	11,510	357	309
		4. Mugu	18	2	31,465	55	-
		5. Humla	27	2	43,038	94	-
		Total	94	26	177,310	3,421	4,267
Total			510	404	2,709,687	391,540	98,728
5. Far-Western Dev. Region	1. Seti	1. Bajura	27	6	97,581	229	77
		2. Bghang	47	6	168,975	46	-
		3. Achham	75	18	228,852	94	-
		4. Doti	51	18	207,066	5,785	3,587
		5. Kailali	44	42	616,727	23,613	12,487
		Total	244	90	1,319,201	29,767	16,151
	2. Mahakali	1. Kanchanpur	20	17	377,899	6,998	2,585
		2. Dadheldhura	21	11	126,162	3,652	1,892
		3. Baitadi	63	22	234,418	174	-
		4. Darchula	41	3	121,828	54	-
		Total	145	53	860,307	10,878	4,477
Total			389	143	2,179,508	40,645	20,628

Source: HMG/ Nepal, National Planning Commission Secretariat, Central Bureau of Statistics and UNFPA. Population of Nepal: Village Development Committee/Municipalities, Population Census 2001-Selected Tables on Caste/Ethnicity, Mother Tongue

Table No. 2.2

Development Wise Urban Magar population and Magar Tongue

Development Region	Total Urban Population	Magar Population / percent	Magar Tongue / percent
1. Eastern Region	624610	15368 (2.46%)	9002 (58.58%)
2. Central Region	1605264	43518 (2.71)	13865 (31.86%)
3. Western Region	520826	54291 (10.42)	19445 (35.82)
4. Mid- western Region	231375	18047 (7.8%)	5632 (31.21%)
5. Far- western Region	245804	3128 (1.27%)	1784 (57.03%)
Total population	3227879	134352 (4.16%)	49728 (37.01)

Source: CBS, 2002.

Appendix - 3

Table No. 3.1

Some Insurgencies and Revolts of Indigenous Nationalities

A. D.	Events	Place
1770	Ten Libuwan Revolt	Pallo Kirant
1778	Limbu Language Oppress, Killed of Phakosek Limbu and exiled to other	Pallo Kirant
1781	Kirant Revolt	Majha Kirant
1791/92	Limbu Revolt	Pallo Kirant
1791/92	Tamang (Murmi) Revolt	Nuwakot
1808	Khambu (Rai) Revolt (Death Sentenced for 2, Abandoned of whole property of 15 persons)	Bhojapur
1858	Sukhadev Gurung Revolt (Killed after 17 years imprisoned punishment)	Lamjung
1867	Avoid of Dashin (Murder of Ramlihang and Ridama)	Dhankuta
1870	Limbu Language Oppression (exiled to Siridhewi)	Pallo Kirant
1876	Lakhan Thapa Magar Revolt (Hanged to 7 Persons)	Gorkha
1877	Supati Gurung Revolt (Murdered in Tundikhel)	Gorkha
1914	Limbu Language Oppression, some Limbu speaker killed and some exiled	Kirantprades
1925	Exiled Chhring Norbu Lama and other 4 Monks	Patan
1926	Nepal Language Development Mandal (Nepal Language Activism)	Kolkotta
1937	Monks exiled with alleged religion dissemination	Kathmandu
1940	Imprisoned to Literaturests of Nepal Language	Kathmandu
1941	Death Penalty to 4 state revolt (3 Newar)	Kathmandu
1950/51	Kiranti Movement	Kirantprades
1951	Tamang Revolt (Peasant Movement)	Nuwakot
1956	Kirant Revolt in against Kipat eradication	Kirantprades
1964	Kirant Revolt in against Kipat eradication	Kirantprades
1965	Nepal language Oppression, imprisoned to 6 Newar language activists	Kathmandu
1988	Arrested and imprisoned to more than 190 activists, poets and writer of Nepal language	Kathmandu
1988	Imprisoned to 4 activists of Limbu Language	Taplegung, Panchthar

Source: Gurung 2005: 432, Sherchan 2004: 9-10

Table No. 3.2**Caste and Ethnic Composition in Central Level Structure of Political Parties**

Political Party/Caste-Ethnicity	NC	NCP-Maoist	NCP-UML	Total/Percent
Brahamin	26	15	38	79/48.46
Chhetri/Thakuri	12	7	8	27/16.56
Newar	5	3	6	14/8.58
Gurung	2	1	3	6/3.68
Rai	2	1	3	6/3.68
Limbu	1	-	2	3/1.84
Tamang	2	-	-	2/1.22
Magar	-	4	-	4/2.45
Tarai/Madheshi	11	1	4	16/9.81
Dalits	2	1	1	4/2.45
Muslim	2	-	-	2/1.22
Total	65	33	65	163/100.00

Source: Field Study-November, 2006

Table No. 3.3**Caste and Ethnic Composition of the First Parliament (1959)**

Caste/Ethnicity	Number	Percent
Brahmin	30	27.52
Syanyasi	1	0.91
Thakuri/Chhetri	35	32.11
Newar	4	3.66
Gurung	6	5.50
Magar	2	1.83
Tamang (Lama)	2	1.83
Rai	3	2.75
Limbu	4	3.66
Chaudhari (Tharu)	5	4.58
Tarai (Madheshi)	14	12.84

Muslim	2	1.83
Thakali	1	0.91
Total	109	100

Source: *The List of the MPs of the First Parliament (HoR – 1959), Parliament Secretariat, August – 2007, (The result was published in VS 2016/1/28).*

Table No. 3.4

Caste and Ethnic composition in the Nepali Parliament, 1959-1999

Caste/ Ethnicity	1959	1967	1978	1981	1986	1991	1994	1999	NA (1991-2006)
Brahamin Num.	30	30	27	14	23	77	86	77	66
Percent	27.5	24.0	21.3	12.5	20.5	37.6	41.9	37.6	40.9
Chhetri Num.	34	47	46	41	43	39	40	44	26
Percent	31.2	37.6	36.2	36.6	38.4	19.0	19.5	21.5	16.4
Newar Num.	7	15	10	9	7	14	13	14	21
Percent	3.7	12.0	7.9	8.0	6.9	6.8	6.3	6.8	13.0
Magar Num.	2	2	1	4	5	3	4	5	3
Percent	1.8	1.6	0.8	3.6	4.5	1.5	1.9	2.4	1.8
Other Janajait, Num.	19	19	27	32	24	45	34	30	16
Percent	17.4	15.2	21.2	28.6	21.4	22.0	16.6	14.6	10.0
Tarai Num.	18	11	14	10	10	21	24	27	20
Percent	16.5	8.8	11.0	8.9	8.9	10.2	11.7	13.2	12.4
Muslim Num.	2	0	1	2	0	5	4	2	1
Percent	1.8	0	0.8	1.8	0	2.8	1.9	0.9	0.6
Dalits Num.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8
Percent	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4.9
Total Num.	109	125	127	112	112	205	205	205	161
Percent	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Constructing the table on the based of the List of the MPs, that provided by the Parliamentary Secretariat, Kathmandu/ 2063/6/7

Table No. 3.5

Ethnic Representation in the Constitutional Organs

Caste/Ethnicity	PSC (2008- 2065VS)	ICAU (2034- 2065VS)	Auditor General (2016-2065VS)	Attorney General (2009-2065VS)	Election Com. (2008- 2065VS)	Total
	Chief Member	Chief Member			Chief Member	

Brahmin	2 7	3 12	4	6	3 5	42
Thakuri/Chhetri	5 7		4	4	5 5	30
Tarai	3 9	1		2	2	17
Newar	5 7	1 4	2	4	3 3	29
Magar						
Gurung	1				1	2
Rai	1 1					2
Limbu	1	1				2
Tamang	1					1
Thakali		1				1
Total	16 34	5 18	10	16	11 16	126

Source : Filed Study, 2008.

Table No. 3.6

Caste and Ethnic Composition in the High Level Bureaucracy

Caste / Ethnicity	Secretary	Joint Secretary	Total
Brahmin	32	88	120 / 75.0%
Chhetri	3	11	14 / 8.7%
Newar	6	13	19 / 11.9%
Tarai	2	2	4 / 2.5%
Gharti/Bhujel	1		1 / 0.6%
Rai		1	1 / 0.6%
Dalits		1	1 / 0.6%
Total	44	116	160

Source : Filed Study, 2008.

Table No. 3.7

Caste and Ethnic composition in Police Force

S.N.	Caste/Ethnicity	IG	AIG	DIG	SSP	SP	DSP	Inspector	Total	Percent
1.	Brahamin	-	-	1	7	34	60	196	298	32.18
2.	Thakuri/Chhetri	1	1	7	16	27	75	308	435	46.97
3.	Newar	-	-	3	3	12	32	53	103	11.12
4.	Gurung	-	-	2	3	3	5	10	23	2.48
5.	Magar	-	-	2	3	3	3	12	23	2.48

6.	Rai/Limbu	-	-	1	3	-	4	07	15	1.61
7.	Tamang	-	-	-	-	1	3	02	06	0.64
8.	Tharu	-	-	-	-	1	3	05	09	0.97
9.	Other Ethnicity	-	-	-	-	-	1	05	06	0.64
10.	Dalits	-	-	-	-	-	3	05	08	0.86
	Total	1	1	16	35	81	189	603	926	100

Source : Filed Study, 2006.

Table No. 3.8
Caste and Ethnic Composition in Nepal Army

S.N.	Caste/Ethnicity	Number	Percentage
1.	Brahamin	73	16.07
2.	Giri/Syanyasi	4	0.88
2.	Thakuri/Chhetri	277	61.01
3.	Newar	37	8.14
4.	Gurung	25	5.50
5.	Magar	8	1.76
6.	Rai/Limbu	15	3.30
7.	Tamang	5	1.10
8.	Tarai	5	1.10
9.	Other Ethnicity	4	0.88
10.	Dalits	1	0.22
	Total	454	100

Source : Filed Study, 2007.

Appendix – 4

Political Sociology of the Respondents

(Source: Field Survey, 2006)

Table No. 4.1

Place of residence

	Voters			Activists		
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Rural	235	78.3	78.3	31	41.3	41.3
Urban	65	21.7	21.7	44	58.7	58.7
Total	300	100.0	100.0	75	100.0	100.0

Table No. 4.2

Clan

	Voters			Activists		
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Thapa	92	30.7	30.7	30	40.0	40.0
Rana	34	11.3	11.3	7	9.3	9.3
Ale	13	4.3	4.3	2	2.7	2.7
Pun	111	37.0	37.0	29	38.7	38.7
Gharti	12	4.0	4.0	2	2.7	2.7
Rokka	19	6.3	6.3	2	2.7	2.7
Bhudha/ Bhudhathoki	19	6.3	6.3	3	4.0	4.0
Total	300	100.0	100.0	75	100.0	100.0

Table No. 4.3

Age group

	Voters			Activists		
	Frequency	Percent	Valid	Frequency	Percent	Valid

			Percent			Percent
18-30	73	24.3	24.3	8	10.7	10.7
31-45	97	32.3	32.3	32	42.7	42.7
46-60	79	26.3	26.3	22	29.3	29.3
Above 60	51	17.0	17.0	13	17.3	17.3
Total	300	100.0	100.0	75	100.0	100.0

Table No. 4.4

Level of education

	Voters			Activists		
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Illiterate	69	23.0	23.0	1	1.3	1.3
Literate	104	34.7	34.7	24	32.0	32.0
High School	88	29.3	29.3	24	32.0	32.0
Intermediate	25	8.3	8.3	6	8.0	8.0
Bachelor	12	4.0	4.0	18	24.0	24.0
Master Degree and above	2	.7	.7	2	2.7	2.7
Total	300	100.0	100.0	75	100.0	100.0

Table No. 4.5

Family background

	Voters			Activists		
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Ex-army (British, India and Nepal)	144	48.0	48.0	36	48.0	48.0
Mukhiya/Jimmuwal	15	5.0	5.0	11	14.7	14.7

Peasant	129	43.0	43.0	27	36.0	36.0
Business/Service	6	2.0	2.0	1	1.3	1.3
Others - civil job in foreign	6	2.0	2.0	75	100.0	100.0
Total	300	100.0	100.0			

Table No. 4.6

Profession/Occupation of respondent

	Voters			Activists		
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Ex-army/Police (British, India)	30	10.0	10.0			
Government service	14	4.7	4.7			
Employee in private sector	23	7.7	7.7			
Foreign civil job	2	.7	.7			
Peasant/Housewife	191	63.7	63.7			
Student	40	13.3	13.3			
Social/Political Service				75	100.0	100.0
Total	300	100.0	100.0	75	100.0	100.0

Table No. 4.7

Religion

	Voters			Activists		
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Hindu	244	81.3	81.3	37	49.3	49.3
Buddha	23	7.7	7.7	16	21.3	21.3

Animism-Shamanism	32	10.7	10.7	19	25.3	25.3
Christian	1	.3	.3	1	1.3	1.3
Nastik				2	2.7	2.7
Total	300	100.0	100.0	75	100.0	100.0

Table No. 4.8

Religion

	Voters				Activists			
	Kaski	Myagdi	Palpa	Total	Kaski	Myagdi	Palpa	Total
Hindu	87 87.0%	72 72.0%	85 85.0%	244 81.3%	13 52.0%	10 40.0%	14 56.0%	37 49.3%
Buddha	8 8.0%	7 7.0%	8 8.0%	23 7.7%	7 28.0%	5 20.0%	4 16.0%	16 21.3%
Shamanism	5 5.0%	20 20.0%	7 7.0%	32 10.7%	4 16.0%	8 32.0%	7 28.0%	19 25.3%
Christian		1 1.0%		1 0.3%		1 4.0%		1 1.3%
Nastik					1 4.0%	1 4.0%		2 2.7%
Total	100 100.0%	100 100.0%	100 100.0%	300 100.0%	25 100.0%	25 100.0%	25 100.0%	75 100.0%

Table No. 4. 9

Do you speak your mother tongue?

	Voters			Activists		
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Yes	92	30.7	30.7	21	28.0	28.0
No	189	63.0	63.0	35	46.7	46.7
A little bit	19	6.3	6.3	19	25.3	25.3
Total	300	100.0	100.0	75	100.0	100.0

Table No. 4.10

Gender

	Voters			Activists		
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Male	142	47.3	47.3	57	76.0	76.0
Female	158	52.7	52.7	18	24.0	24.0
Total	300	100.0	100.0	75	100.0	100.0

Table No. 4.11

District

	Voters			Activists		
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Kaski	100	33.3	33.3	25	33.3	33.3
Myagdi	100	33.3	33.3	25	33.3	33.3
Palpa	100	33.3	33.3	25	33.3	33.3
Total	300	100.0	100.0	75	100.0	100.0

Table No. 4.12

VDCs/City-Municipals

	Voters			Activists		
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Lumle	23	7.7	7.7	4	5.3	5.3
Nirmal Pokhari	22	7.3	7.3	3	4.0	4.0
Pokhara	55	18.3	18.3	18	24.0	9.3
Baranja	42	14.0	14.0	5	6.7	6.7
Beni Bazar	5	1.7	1.7	11	14.7	14.7
Histan	53	17.7	17.7	9	12.0	12.0
Pipal Danda	74	24.7	24.7	6	8.0	8.0
Somadi	21	7.0	7.0	4	5.3	5.3
Tansen	5	1.7	1.7	15	20.0	20.0

Total	300	100.0	100.0	75	100.0	100.0
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Table No. 4.13
Possession of land area

	Voters			Activists		
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
< 11 Ropani: Rural Areas	124	41.3	41.3	10	13.3	13.3
11-20 Ropani: Rural Areas	81	27.0	27.0	15	20.0	20.0
20-40 Ropani: Rural Areas	25	8.3	8.3	7	9.3	9.3
Above 40 Ropani: Rural Areas	5	1.7	1.7	2	2.7	2.7
< 1 Ropani: Urban Areas	33	11.0	11.0	13	17.3	17.3
1-3 Ropani: Urban Areas	24	8.0	8.0	13	17.3	17.3
3-5 Ropani: Urban Areas	4	1.3	1.3	9	12.0	12.0
Above 5 Ropani: Urban Areas	4	1.3	1.3	6	8.0	8.0
Total	300	100.0	100.0	75	100.0	100.0

Appendix - 5

Magar Activism

(Source: Field Survey, 2006)

Table No. 5.1

Do you know about the existence of the Magar organization?

	Voters			Activists		
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Yes	193	64.3	64.3	70	93.3	93.3
No	107	35.7	35.7	5	6.7	6.7
Total	300	100.0	100.0	75	100.0	100.0

Table No. 5.2

If yes, in which organization are you affiliated?

	Voters			Activists		
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Nepal Magar Sangh	77	25.7	39.9	41	54.7	58.6
Pun Society	22	7.3	11.4	3	4.0	4.3
Both, 1 and 2	11	3.7	5.7	4	5.3	5.7
Magar Liberation Front	7	2.3	3.6	6	8.0	8.6
Not affiliated with any organization	76	25.3	39.4	16	21.3	22.9
Total	193	64.3	100.0	70	93.3	100.0
System	107	35.7		5	6.7	
Total Respondents	300	100.0		75	100.0	

Percentage based on Multiple Responses

Table No. 5.3**If yes, how often you participate in the programmes of the organisation?**

	Voters			Activists		
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Regular	14	4.7	12.0	37	49.3	68.5
Sometimes	88	29.3	75.2	17	22.7	31.5
Not participated	15	5.0	12.8	54	72.0	100.0
Total	117	39.0	100.0	21	28.0	
System	183	61.0		75	100.0	
Total Respondents	300	100.0				

Table No. 5.4**If yes, how often you participate in the programmes of that organisation?**

Participation	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Regular	51	13.6	29.8
Sometimes	105	28.0	61.4
Not participated	15	4.0	8.8
Total	171	45.6	100.0
System	204	54.4	
	375	100.0	

Table No. 5.5

**Do you know the policies/programmes of your own affiliated
(Magar) Organisation?**

	Voters			Activists		
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Yes	87	29.0	74.4	51	68.0	94.4
No	30	10.0	25.6	3	4.0	5.6
Total	117	39.0	100.0	54	72.0	100.0

System	183	61.0		21	28.0	
Total Respondents	300	100.0		75	100.0	

Table No. 5.6**If yes, tell some policies/programmes**

	Voters			Activists		
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Conservation and promotion of Magar culture and identity	62	71.2	71.2	40	78.4	78.4
Education and awareness for Magar	34	39.0	39.0	23	45.0	45.0
Unity and cooperation among Magars	46	52.9	52.9	35	68.6	68.6
Reforms against bad practices	15	17.2	17.2	18	35.3	35.3
Upliftment and development of Magar community	37	42.5	42.5	14	27.4	27.4
Settlement of ethnic problems	11	12.6	12.6	9	17.6	17.6
Empower to Magar	15	17.2	17.2	42	82.3	82.3
Total	87	29.0	252.6	51	68.0	354.6
System	213	71.0		24	32.0	
Total Respondents	300	100.0		75	100.0	

Percentage based on Multiple Responses

Appendix – 6

Democracy and the Magars

(Source: Field Survey, 2006)

Table No. 6.1
Did you participate in any of the following election?

	Voters			Activists		
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
G E in 1991	140	46.7	46.7	50	66.7	66.7
G E in 1994	152	50.7	50.7	53	70.7	70.7
G E in 1999	231	77.0	77.3	65	86.7	86.7
L E in 1992	145	48.3	48.3	56	74.7	74.7
L E in 1997	207	69.0	69.0	62	82.7	82.7
Did not cast	54	18.0	18.0			
Total	300	100.0	100.0	75	100.0	100.0

Percentage based on Multiple Responses

Table No. 6.2
If yes, to which candidate did you cast the vote?

	Voters			Activists		
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Political party	183	61.0	74.4	61	81.3	87.3
Own ethnicity	23	7.7	9.3	3	4.0	4.3
Relative/friend	25	8.3	10.2	6	8.0	8.6
Don't know	15	5.0	6.1			
Total	246	82.0	100.0	70.	93.3	100.0
Missing system	54	18.0		5	6.7	
Total Respsd.	300	100.0%		75	100.0	

Table No. 6.3**Did you participate in the people's movement-2062/63 (April, 2006)?**

	Voters			Activists		
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Yes	115	38.3	38.3	64	85.3	85.3
No	185	61.7	61.7	11	14.7	14.7
Total	300	100.0	100.0	75	100.0	100.0

Table No. 6.4**If yes, why did you participate?**

	Voters			Activists		
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
For democracy	99	33.0	86.0	48	60.0	75.0
Called by political party	50	16.7	43.5	30	10.0	46.9
Request by friends/relatives	25	8.3	21.7	5	1.7	7.8
Sent by Maoist	43	14.3	37.4	12	4.0	18.7
Request by ethnic organization	26	8.7	22.6	26	8.7	40.6
Don't know	4	1.3	3.5	64	85.3	100.0
Total	115	38.3	100.0	11	14.7	
System	185	61.7		75	100.0	
Total Respondents	300	100.0				

Percentage based on Multiple Responses

Table No. 6.5

What do you mean by democracy?

	Voters			Activists		
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Liberty and equality	200	66.7	66.7	57	76.0	76.0
People's representative government and party system	150	50.0	50.0	58	77.3	77.3
Rule of law	42	14.0	14.0	17	22.7	22.7
Inclusiveness	41	13.7	13.7	20	26.7	26.7
Peace, security and development	69	23.0	23.0	17	22.7	22.7
Republic system	12	4.0	4.0	10		13.3
Conflict and instability (negative sense)	12	4.0	4.0			
Don't know	57	19.0	19.0			
Total	300	100.0	100.0	75	100.0	100.0

Percentage based on Multiple Responses

Table No. 6.6

What do you mean by democracy? * Voters * Multiple Responses*

	Gender		District			Place		Age				Education				
	Male	Female	Kaski	Myagdi	Palpa	Rural	Urban	18-30	31-45	46-60	>60	Illiterate	Literate	School	Campus	University
Liberty and equality	103	97	58	70	72	136	30	57	69	55	19	26	69	63	33	2
People's government and party system	77	73	44	42	64	38	14	45	51	41	14	16	55	52	25	2
Rule of law	26	25	25	3	14	18	9	13	15	10	4	1	16	15	8	2
Inclusiveness	21	25	14	22	19	11	4	12	17	8	4	6	11	17	7	
Peace, security and development	37	32	24	32	36	25	3	9	26	21	13	15	30	16	8	

Republic system	7	3	1	6	3	8	2			1			1	1		
Conflict& instability (negative sense)	3	10	7	4	2	4	3	2	4	5	6	6	3	3		
Don't know	18	39	26	16	15	40	17	7	9	17	24	34	15	8		
Total	142	158	100	100	100	235	65	73	97	79	51	69	104	88	25	2

Table No. 6.7

Which government do you like most in post 1991?

	Voters			Activists		
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
NC, Deupa in 1995	3	1.0	1.0	3	4.0	4.0
NC, GP's in 1991	27	9.0	9.0	8	10.7	10.7
RPP, Chan in 1997	8	2.7	2.7	40	53.3	53.3
UML, MM's in 1994	122	40.7	40.7	22	29.3	29.3
No one	90	30.0	30.0	2	2.7	2.7
Don't know	50	16.7	16.7	75	100.0	100.0
Total	300	100.0	100.0			

Table No. 6.8

Which government do you like most in post 1991?

	Voters			Activists		
	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total
NC, Deupa 1995	3/1.3%		3/1.0%	1/3.2%	2/4.5%	3/4.0%
NC, GP's 1991	23/9.8%	4/6.2%	27/9.0%	2/6.5%	6/13.6%	8/10.7%
RPP, Chand's 1997	5/2.1%	3/4.6%	8/2.7%			
UML, MM's 1994	106/45.1%	16/24.6%	122/40.7%	51.6%	54.5%	53.3%
No one	60/25.5%	30/46.2%	90/30.0%	11/35.5%	11/25.0%	22/29.3%
Don't know	38/16.2%	12/18.5%	50/16.7%	1/3.2%	1/2.3%	2/2.7%
Total	235/100.0%	65/100.0%	300/100.0%	31/100.0%	44/100.0%	75/100.0%

District	Kaski	Myagdi	Palpa	Total	Kaski	Myagdi	Palpa	Total
NC, Deupa 1995		1/1.0%	2/2.0%	3/1.0%	1/4.0%		2/8.0%	3/4.0%
NC, GP's 1991	10/10.0%		17/17.0%	27/9.0%	2/8.0%	1/4.0%	5/20.0%	8/10.7%
RPP Chand 1997	5/5.0%	2/2.0%	1/1.0%	8/2.7%				
UML, MM's 1994	28/28.0%	48/48.0%	46/46.0%	122/40.7%	17/68.0%	14/56.0%	9/36.0%	40/53.3%
No one	38/30.0%	32/32.0%	20/20.0%	90/30.0%	4/16.0%	9/36.0%	9/36.0%	22/29.3%
Don't know	19/19.0%	17/17.0%	14/14.0%	50/16.7%	1/4.0%	1/4.0%		2/2.7%
Total	100/100.0%	100/100.0%	100/100.0%	300/100.0%	25/100.0%	25/100.0%	25/100.0%	75/100.0%

Table No. 6.9

What is your evaluation on the performance of the present government?

	Voters			Activists		
	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total
Not bad	130/55.3%	39/60.0%	169/56.3%	21/67.7%	29/65.9%	50/66.7%
Good	15/6.4%	3/4.6%	18/6.0%	4/12.9%	6/13.6%	10/13.3%
Very good	4/1.7%		4/1.3%			
Bad	19/8.1%	5/7.7%	24/8.0%	4/12.9%	8/18.2%	12/16.0%
Worse	3/1.3%		3/1.0%			
Worst	4/1.7%		4/1.3%	1/3.2%	1/2.3%	2/2.7%
Don't know	60/25.5%	18/27.7%	78/26.0%	1/3.2%		1/1.3%
Total	235/100.0%	65/100.0%	300/100.0%	31/100.0%	44/100.0%	75/100.0%

District	Kaski	Myagdi	Palpa	Total	Kaski	Myagdi	Palpa	Total
Not bad	55/55.0%	55/55.0%	59/59.0%	169/56.3%	19/76.0%	18/72.0%	13/52.0%	50/66.7%
Good	6/6.0%	2/2.0%	10/10.0%	18/6.0%	2/8.0%	1/4.0%	7/28.0%	10/13.3%
Very good	4/4.0%			4/1.3%				
Bad	8/8.0%	9/9.0%	7/7.0%	24/8.0%	3/12.0%	6/24.0%	3/12.0%	12/16.0%
Worse	2/2.0%	1/1.0%		3/1.0%				
Worst		3/3.0%	1/1.0%	4/1.3%			2/8.0%	2/2.7%
Don't know	25/25.0%	30/30.0%	23/23.0%	78/26.0%	1/4.0%			1/1.3%
	100/100.0%	100/100.0%	100/100.0%	300/100.0%	25/100.0%	25/100.0%	25/100.0%	75/100.0%

Source: Field Survey, 2006.

Table No. 6.10

What do you think about the present government?

	Voters			Activists		
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Not bad	169	56.3	56.3	50	66.7	66.7
Good	18	6.0	6.0	10	13.3	13.3
Very good	4	1.3	1.3	12	16.0	16.0

Bad	24	8.0	8.0	2	2.7	2.7
Worse	3	1.0	1.0	1	1.3	1.3
Worst	4	1.3	1.3	75	100.0	100.0
Don't know	78	26.0	26.0			
Total	300	100.0	100.0			

Table No. 6.11

What is your evaluation towards democracy in Nepal?

	Voters			Activists		
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
It is needed	243	81.0	81.0	75	100.0	100.0
It is not needed	2	.7	.7			
Don't know	55	18.3	18.3			
Total	300	100.0	100.0	75	100.0	100.0

Table No. 6.12

What is your opinion towards monarchy?

	Voters			Activists		
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Ceremonial monarchy	51	17.0	17.0	12	16.0	16.0
Absolute monarchy	7	2.3	2.3			
Republic democracy	171	57.0	57.0	62	82.7	82.7
Don't know	71	23.7	23.7	1	1.3	1.3
Total	300	100.0	100.0	75	100.0	100.0

Appendix - 7

Magars and Political Parties

(Source: Field Survey, 2006)

Table No. 7.1

Caste and Ethnic Composition in District level Structure of Major Political Parties

Description	Brahamin	Chhetri /Thakuri	Synasi/giri	Newar	Gurung	Magar	Thakali	Tamang	Chhan tyal	Dalits	Muslim	Total
NC-Kaski	27 57.4 %	8 17.0%	1 2.1%	4 8.5%	4 8.5%	-	1 2.1%	-	-	2 4.2%	-	47 100%
NCPMaoi st-Kaski	8 30%	3 11%	-	-	6 22%	3 11%	-	-	-	7 26%	-	27 100%
NCP- UML- Kaski	24 65%	3 8%	-	2 5.5%	6 16%	-	-	-	-	2 5.5%	-	37 100%
People Front (M)#	6 50%	2 17%	1 8%	-	-	2 17%	-	-	-	1 8%	-	12 100%
People Front (E)#	4 44.5 %	1 11%	-	-	-	-	-	2 22.2 %	-	2 22.2 %	-	9 100%
RPP- Kaski	5 18%	12 43%	-	-	10 36%	1 3%	-	-	-	-	-	28 100%
Total	74 46.2 %	29 18.1%	2 1.2%	6 3.7%	26 16.2 %	6 3.7%	1 0.6%	2 1.2%	-	14 8.7%	-	160 100%
Percenta ge of Pop.	30.2 %	16%	1%	5.3%	18.1 %	6.2%	0.5%	2%	-	15.9 %	0.7%	3805 27
NC- Myagdi	2 5.1%	20 51.3%	-	5 12.8 %	-	5 12.8 %	3 7.7%	-	2 5.1%	2 5.1%	-	39 100%

NCP-M-Myagdi	3 17.6 %	2 11.7%	1 5.9%	-	-	7 41.2	-		-	4 23.5 %	-	17 100%
NCP-UML-Mygdi	3 14.3 %	11 52.4%	1 4.7%	1 4.7%	1 4.7%	4 19%	-		-	-	-	21 100%
People Front	3 23%	3 23%	-	1 7.7%	-	5 38.4 %	-		-	1 7.7%	-	13 100%
RPP Myagdi	2 13.3 %	5 33.3%	-	-	-	3 20%	4 26.6 %			1 6.6%	-	15 100%
Total	13 12.4 %	41 39%	2 1.9%	7 6.6%	1 0.9%	24 22.9 %	7 6.7%		2 1.9%	8 7.6%	-	105 100%
Percentage of pop.	7.8%	18.5%	0.4%	1.4%	1%	41.8 %	1.2%		3.9%	22.3 %	-	1144 47
NC-Palpa	26 54.1 %	7 14.6%	1 2.1%	5 10.4 %	-	7 14.6 %	-		-	1 2.1%	1 2.1%	48 100%
NCP Maoist-Palpa	6 31.6 %	3 15.8%	-	1 5.2%	-	5 26.3 %	-		-	4 21%	-	19 100%
NCP-UML-Palpa	18 69.2 %	2 7.7%	-	1 3.8%	-	4 15.4 %	-		-	1 3.8%	-	26 100%
People Front	4 30.7 %	2 15.4%	-	-	-	7 53.8 %	-		-	-	-	13 100%
RPP-Palpa	7 24.1 %	9 31%	-	9 31%	-	4 13.8 %	-		-	-	-	29 100%
Total of Represents	61 45.2 %	23 17%	1 0.7%	16 12%	-	27 20%	- -		- -	6 4.4%	1 0.7%	135 100%
Percent of Populati	19.2 %	9.4%	0.9%	3.6%	-	50.9 %	-		-	5.9%	0.3%	2685 58

on												
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Source: Field Study: June-July, 2006 / Population Census 2001 (Caste/Ethnicity, Mother Tongue & Religion – District Level)

Note: # indicate that People Front (Janamorchha – Nepal) has divided into three factions – Sherchan, former Ekatakendra, KC as Mashal line and Ale as third liner. I have not found such division except in Kaski. In Kaski there are two district level organizations of Janamorchha, M refer to Mashal as KC line and E refer to Ekatakendra as Serchan line. Among three fictions of People Front as Janamorchha-Nepal, KC line as Janamorchha- Nepal backed by Masal-Mohan Bikram is relatively stronger than other fictions in these three districts

Table No. 7.2

Are you a member or supporter of any political party?

	Voters			Activists		
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Yes	131	43.7	43.7	75	100.0	100.0
No	169	56.3	56.3			
Total	300	100.0	100.0			

Table No. 7.3

Which political party do you favour?

	Voters			Activists		
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
NC	28	9.3	21.4	16	21.3	21.3
NCP–Maoist	21	7.0	16.0	20	26.7	26.7
NCP–UML	62	20.7	47.3	22	29.3	29.3
Janamukti	6	2.0	4.6	8	10.7	10.7
RPP	14	4.7	10.7	2	2.7	2.7
Others				7	9.3	9.3
Total	131	43.7	100.0	75	100.0	100.0
System	169	56.3				
Total Respondents	300	100.0		75	100.0	100.0

Table No. 7.4**Are you involved in any sister organization of political party?**

	Voters			Activists		
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Yes	16	5.3	12.2	25	33.3	33.3
No	115	38.3	87.8	50	66.7	66.7
Total	131	43.7	100.0	75	100.0	100.0
System	169	56.3				
Total Respondents	300	100.0				

Table No. 7.5**How often you participate in programmes of political party or Organization?**

	Voters			Activists		
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Regular	3	1.0	2.3	25	33.3	33.3
Sometimes	86	28.7	65.6	44	58.7	58.7
Not participate	37	12.3	28.2	6	8.0	8.0
Don't know	5	1.7	3.8			
Total	131	43.7	100.0	75	100.0	100.0
System	169	56.3				
Total Respondents	300	100.0		75	100.0	100.0

Table No. 7.6**Why do you like that party/sister organization?**

	Voters				Activists			
	Kaski	Myagdi	Palpa	Total	Kaski	Myagdi	Palpa	Total
Principle	22	30	34	86	18	14	19	51

	68.8%	51.7%	82.9%	65.6%	72.0%	56.0%	76.0%	68.0%
Leaders	1 3.1%	5 8.6%	1 2.4%	7 5.3%	2 8.0%	2 8.0%	1 4.0%	5 6.7%
History	1 3.1%			1 .8%	1 4.0%		1 4.0%	2 2.7%
Activities	1 3.1%	8 13.8%	4 9.8%	13 9.9%	1 4.0%	5 20.0%		6 8.0%
Relatives/ Friends	2 6.3%	7 12.1%	1 2.4%	10 7.6%	3 12.0%	1 4.0%	2 8.0%	6 8.0%
Others		5 8.6%	1 2.4%	6 4.6%		3 12.0%	2 8.0%	5 6.7%
Don't know	5 15.6%	3 5.2%		8 6.1%				
Total	32 100.0%	58 100.0%	41 100.0%	131 100.0%	25 100.0%	25 100.0%	25 100.0%	75 100.0%

Table No. 7.7**Why do you like that party/sister organization?**

	Voters			Activists		
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Principle	103	34.3	78.6	60	80.0	80.0
Leaders	56	18.7	42.7	26	34.7	34.7
History	25	8.3	19.0	20	26.6	26.6
Activities	88	29.3	67.2	48	64.0	64.0
Relatives/Friends	60	20.0	45.8	24	32.0	32.0
Others	25	8.3	19.0	38	50.7	50.7
Don't know	8	2.7	6.1			
Total	131	43.7	100.0	75	100.0	100.0
System	169	56.3				
Total Respondents	300	100.0		75	100.0	100.0

Percentage based on Multiple Responses

Appendix - 8

Maoist and the Magars

(Source: Field Survey, 2006)

Table No. 8.1

Do you hear Maoist people's war?

	Voters			Activists		
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Yes	275	91.7	91.7	75	100.0	100.0
No	2	.7	.7			
Don't know	23	7.7	7.7			
Total	300	100.0	100.0	75	100.0	100.0

Table No. 8.2

In your opinion what is/are the cause/causes of the Maoist war?

	Voters			Activists		
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Unemployment and Poverty	200	66.7	67.1	57	76.0	76.0
Corruption and miss-governance	127	42.3	42.6	57	76.0	76.0
Government's suppression	47	15.7	15.8	16	21.3	21.3
Exclusionary state	142	47.3	47.6	50	66.7	66.7
Maoist's desire for power	77	25.7	25.8	29	38.7	38.7
Murder of King Briendra	15	1.7	1.7	14	18.7	18.7
Don't know	52	17.3	17.4			
Total	298	99.3	100.0	75	100.0	100.0
System	2	.7				
Total Respondents	300	100.0		75	100.0	100.0

Percentage based on Multiple Responses

Table No. 8.3**How the Maoist conflict can be solved?**

	Voters			Activists		
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Peace negotiation	105	35.0	35.2	29	38.7	38.7
Employment and proportional development	134	44.7	45.0	38	50.7	50.7
Coalition government including Maoist	174	58.0	58.4	47	62.7	62.7
Election for constituent assembly	56	18.7	18.8	30	40.0	40.0
Proportional representation and inclusion	107	35.6	35.9	45	60.0	60.0
Republic state	24	6.7	8.0	11	14.7	14.7
Don't know	56	18.7				
Total	298	99.3	204.9	75	266.8	266.8
System	2	.7				
Total Respondents	300	100.0		75	266.8	266.8

Percentage based on Multiple Responses

Appendix – 9

Restructuring of the state

(Source: Field Survey, 2006)

Table No. 9.1

Do you know ethnic autonomy?

	Voters			Activists		
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Yes	130	43.3	43.3	70	93.3	93.3
No	170	56.7	56.7	5	6.7	6.7
Total	300	100.0	100.0	75	100.0	100.0

Table No. 9.2

Do you Support ethnic autonomy?

	Voters			Activists		
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Yes	63	21.0	48.5	31	41.3	44.3
No	53	17.7	40.8	33	44.0	47.1
Don't know	14	4.7	10.8	6	8.0	8.6
Total	130	43.3	100.0	70	93.3	100.0
System	170	56.7		5	6.7	
Total Respondents	300	100.0		75	100.0	

Table No. 9.3

Which Form of Autonomy do you support?

Forms of Autonomy	Voters				Activists				Frequency
	Kaski	Myagdi	Palpa	Total	Kaski	Myagdi	Palpa	Total	
Ethnic (Magar) Autonomy	13	26	24	63	6	16	12	34	97
Federal	25	13	15	53	15	6	9	30	83

(Regional) Autonomy									
Don't know	5	8	1	14	2	3	1	6	20
Sub-Total	43	47	40	130	23	25	22	70	200
Missing	57	53	60	170	2	-	3	5	175
Total	100	100	100	300	25	25	25	75	375

Source: Field Survey, 2006.

Table No. 9.4
Which Form of Federal Autonomy do you support?

Background	Forms of FA	Kaski	Myagdi	Palpa	Total
Activists	Ethnicity	6/26.1%	16/64.0%	9/40.9%	31/44.3%
	Regionalism	15/65.2%	6/24.0%	12/54.5%	33/47.1%
	Don't know	2/8.7%	3/12.0%	1/4.5%	6/8.6%
	Total	23/100.0%	25/100.0%	22/100.0%	70/100.0%
Non-Activists	Ethnicity	13/30.2%	26/55.3%	24/60.0%	63/48.4%
	Regionalism	25/58.1%	13/27.7%	15/37.5%	53/40.8%
	Don't know	5/11.6%	8/17.0%	1/2.5%	14/10.8%
	Total	43/100.0%	47/100.0%	40/100.0%	130/100.0%

Source: Field Survey, 2006.

Table No. 9.5
What do you mean Magar autonomy?

	Voters			Activists		
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Gain of ethnic rights	34	26.1	26.1	18	25.7	25.7
Educational, social, economic and political development	30	30.0	30.0	21	30.0	30.0
Development of Magar culture and language	21	16.1	16.1	12	17.1	17.1
Magar autonomous	44	33.8	33.8	27	38.6	38.6

republic						
Against social harmony and national integration	45	34.6	34.6	33	62.8	62.8
Don't know	24	18.5	18.5	7	10.0	10.0
Total	130	100.0	159.1	70	93.3	184.2
System	170	56.7		5	6.7	
Total Respondents	300	100.0		75	100.0	

Percentage based on Multiple Responses

Table No. 9.6**Which level of participation in state from Magar ethnicity do you find?**

	Voters			Activists		
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Well	3	1.0	1.0			
Few	244	81.3	81.3	73	97.3	97.3
Don't know	53	17.7	17.7	2	2.7	2.7
Total	300	100.0	100.0	75	100.0	100.0

Table No. 9.7**How to increase Magars' participation in polity? (Open ended)**

	Voters			Activists		
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Educational/political awareness	244	81.3	81.3	73	97.3	97.3
Unity among the Magars	174	58.0	58.0	49	65.3	65.3
Give off bad culture and bad trends	103	34.3	34.3	39	52.0	52.0
Reservation	25	8.3	8.3	10	13.3	13.3
End of ethnic indiscrimination and policy for upliftment	30	10.0	10.0	16	21.3	21.3
Employment and development for Magar regions	52	17.3	17.3	9	12.0	12.0
Proportional representation in accordance with population	33	11.0	11.0	22	29.3	29.3
Don't know	37	12.3	12.3			
Total	300	232.5	232.5	75	290.5	290.5

Percentage based on Multiple Responses

Table No. 9.8

Which structure do you prefer for the interest of ethnic strata of population including Magar? (Close ended)

	Voters			Activists		
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Ethnic autonomy	69	23.0	23.0	29	38.7	38.7
Local/Regional autonomy	167	55.7	55.7	56	74.7	74.7
Quota/Reservation system	97	32.3	32.3	17	22.7	22.7
Magar/Ethnic executive head of the state	40	13.3	13.3	10	13.3	13.3
Federal government	157	52.3	52.3	48	64.0	64.0
Proportional representative system	175	58.3	58.3	65	86.7	86.7
Don't know	56	18.7	18.7			
Total	300	253.6	253.6	75	300.0	300.0

Percentage based on Multiple Responses

Table No. 9.9

Which structure do you prefer for the interest of ethnic groups including Magar? (First Choices Close ended)

		Voters							Activists				
		E A	L A	Q-R S	ME H	PRS	D K	Total	EA	LA	Q-R S	PRS	Total
Possession of Land Area*	< 1Ropani:	13	15	7	8	53	28	124		1		9	10
	11-20Rop.:	5	14	6	1	46	9	81	3	1		11	15
	20-40Rop.:		3	4		14	4	25		1		6	7
	> 40Rop.:		2	1		2		5				2	2
	< 1Ropani:	2	3	2	2	15	9	33	5	1	1	6	13
	1-3Ropani:	2	2	6		11	3	24	2	1		10	13
	3-5Ropani:			2		1	1	4	2	2		5	9
	> 5Ropani:			1		1	2	4				6	6
Place of residence	Rural	18	34	18	9	125	41	235	3	2		26	31
	Urban	4	5	11	2	28	15	65	9	5	1	29	44
Age group	18-30	9	8	9	1	38	8	73	3	2		3	8
	31-45	7	12	8	6	52	12	97	4	2	1	25	32
	46-60	3	12	5	3	37	19	79	3	1		18	22
	Above 60	3	7	7	1	16	17	51	2	2		9	13
Level of education	Illiterate	2	6	6	3	19	33	69					
	Literate	8	17	9	4	52	14	104	2	2		20	25
	High School	8	11	8	3	51	7	88	6	2		16	24
	Inter	2	4	3	1	13	2	25		1	1	4	6
	Bachelor	2	1	3		6		12	4	2		12	18
	Master &>					2		2				2	2
Gender	Male	12	22	15	5	76	12	142	11	5	1	40	57
	Female	10	17	14	6	67	44	158	1	2		15	18
District	Kaski	6	14	15	6	38	21	100	5	5		15	25
	Myagdi	8	10	7		57	18	100	5	1	1	18	25
	Palpa	8	15	7	5	48	17	100	2	1		22	25
Total		22 7.3%	39 13.0%	29 9.7%	11 3.7%	143 47.7%	56 18.7%	300 100%	12 16.0%	7 9.3%	1 1.3%	55 73.3%	75 100%

Source: Field Survey, 2006.

Note: * Possession of Land Area denotes below 11 Ropani to Above 40 Ropani in Rural parts and below 1 to above 5 Ropani in Urban centers.

Appendix 10

A Case Study of the Baranja VDC, Myagdi

Baranja is one of the major villages of Myagdi district in terms of political activities. One has to rely on vehicular traffic (i.e. a jeep ride for about an hour) and walking (i.e. about three hours walk on foot) to get to the village. The name 'Baranja' is derived from the Magar language and means "a place where the peanuts are available". The Magar of nine *thar ghar* arrived as the first group in the village, which later became fragmented into 54 households. These households still claim themselves to be the aboriginal settlers. They trace their ancient history to the west Kham region (Rolpa) around 400 years ago. The descendants of these earlier 54 households became 281 in 2000 and they are now organized into 300 households. The 2001 census reports that the total population of the village is 5240. A sociological analysis of the population shows that the Magars constitute 51 percent of the population followed by the Dalits with 20 percent. Then the Brahmin, Chhetri, Chantle and Thakali are considered the minority groups. Political history shows that the Chhetri and Thakali of the village have access to high level politics (from the district to the capital) although Magars have played a decisive role in local politics. Out of the 41 VDCs of Myagdi district, Baranja was extremely affected by the conflict during the Maoist People's War.

The Magars of Baranja, particularly clans such as Rokka, Budha and Pun, claimed that the first settlers of the village could trace their ethnic history back to Kham Magars. Some people from the old generations still remembered some words from Kham language. The ethnic identity comes from their closeness to the west Magarant. Although their culture, clans and language are similar to those of northern Magars, they exhibit the aboriginal characters which greatly resemble Kham Magar heritage. Hence, the culture, religion and the life-style seem very different among the Magars from the opposite side of the Myagdi River. The village is Magar-dominated and their culture is extensively performed in terms of the heritage of the Baranja village where almost all the villagers live free from any caste or ethnic discrimination. Hence, some cross-cultural interactions are found between the Magars and the others. Even the people from the Brahmin strata drink and provide alcohol in their ceremonies. Magars also adopt elements from Hindu culture, for example the use of red *Aksheta*, red dresses for bride, perform the Dashain and other festivals. In a group discussion in the village, Brahmin and Magars accepted that they have a lot of cross-cultural activities. They further stated that they have been living together in the same village for a long time and therefore have learned some aspects of culture and habits from each other. It was particularly interesting to note that some Brahmins admitted that they drink alcohol together with Magars and some time with Dalits too. Some Brahmins' wives even drink together with their husbands in order to prevent them from spending the night outside their home. In addition, the researcher also found that many Brahmins used alcohol with an excuse that they learned the drinking habit from Magars and Thakali. A Brahmin of around

50 year-old said 'if we drink in the Magars house why don't we offer them alcohol in our own house, since we are staying in the same village.'

Although, the Magars dominate the population structure, the political authority of the village has almost always been held by a few elites from the Thakali¹⁴⁹ and Chhetire groups since the Panchyat era. It is because Bhim Prasad Gauhan (Thakali) as a big pillar of Panchyat in Myagdi district played a decisive role in local politics. During his era in power there was a saying among the villagers that, 'Baranja is a *karma ghar* (working house) of his'. He was a dictator and did not allow any activities that opposed him. Therefore, in the Panchyati elections he relied on many conspiracies in order to win the elections. It is also alleged that he killed a leader and an activist who tried to contest him. In this Dark Age, there was a teacher at Baranja School who taught the leftist ideology to some youths. Gradually, the local Magar youths, who were considered leftist, started to oppose the decisions of traditional ruling elites and raise the public and ethnic agendas in their favour. Therefore, they succeeded in penetrating the village government through the Panchyati banner without a fight with the traditional ruling elites. However, since the advent of democracy in 1990, the uni-polar Panchayati politics changed into bipolar, as RPP of Panchyati background and leftists of UML, and then became unipolar dominated by the left. Except for some posts held by the RPP, the UML dominated the village politics along with the cooperation from local Magars. The trends of election results in the post 1990 era seem controversial and interesting. The left party almost always used to get majority votes in the local election whereas, the majority votes in the national election used to go to the RPP side. By that time, some other youths were introduced to the radical leftist ideology through their teacher (called BC sir) who was then affiliated with the Maoist political party.

In Baranja, the political conflict began with the burning of the documents of the Small Farmer Office of the Agriculture Bank –*Sana Kisan Bikas Aayojana*- by 'unknown persons'. It is supposed that the incident was carried out by the local Maoist youths. Due to this incident, dozens of people were arrested and tortured, and cases were filed against some of them. These events favoured the Maoist activities. Among the 11 individuals who were killed by the NR in and around Baranja village, nine were Magars. Around 100 people were accused of providing shelters and foods to the rebellions (Maoists) and were victimised through mental and physical torture. Dozens of incidents happened that destroyed crops and houses. The headmaster was also arrested and beaten by the security personnel of the state. On the other side, 3 persons were killed (*Sahpaya*) by the Maoists, who accused them

¹⁴⁹ According to Mukti Rokka, a senior Magar activist in Myagdi district, the Magars have been marginalised since a long time in Myagdi due to the Thakalis monopoly over the power. He said in his interview that since the Magars are innocents and straight, the Thakalis are much clever in doing business. Magars used to drink much raksi (alcohol) and the Thakalis provided them, but they had no money, they gave land instead. Due to this trend, the Magars became gradually poorer and poorer whereas the Thakali became richer and richer. Those who have the much property control the power. Thakalis effectively dominated the authority from the local to the central level in the Myagdi district during the Panchyat era, and even post 1990's democracy, whereas the Magar remained powerless (2063/6/).

for cooperating with the state. Some activists who opposed the Maoists had either broken their hands and legs or seized their property. It seems that the village was under heavy threats from both sides- NR and Maoists. As a result of the Maoist insurgency, villagers suffered from violence, the unstable peace, and the crises in their day to day life. In order to search and patrol, the NR mobilised great number of security personnel and commandos through helicopters and fields. People used to become very frightened when troops appeared in the village. When the troops returned, then the Maoists immediately regained control over the village. During the conflict period, an individual needed a permit from the Maoists to travel in the village. Amar Rokka, who was a Maoist chief at the village at that time, stated that the rule was strictly implemented throughout Baranja VDC. Maoists absolutely denied any official symbol of the state to be displayed in their under-controlled territory, and therefore, destroyed the VDC's office with bombs and didn't allow any representation or activities of the government and non-government (GO/NGO) sectors. Almost all the commoners told the researcher that they were familiar with the condition of the village but hesitant to share their personal stories. It seems that during the Maoist's People's War, Baranja was badly suffered from the conflict.

The People's War that began from the Kham region naturally influenced and affected the Baranja village and the Magars there. Two well-known individuals, Gam Bahadur Shreesh and Amar Rokka,¹⁵⁰ played a bridging role between Baranja and the Maoists in terms of introducing the Maoist ideology and the People's War to the people of Baranja. The Maoist activities appeared for the first time with the incident in the Small Farmer's Office in 1999. The state used police force and arrested many villagers including some innocent people. State police tortured the villagers and filed a case against them. Some youths, who were accused of the incident, went underground and became active in the Maoist party. At that time the local Maoists helped the villagers by arresting and publicising an accused person who had killed his grand father. Maoists got some credit for this event. On the other side, the NR arrested two innocent persons who died due to torture inflicted upon them. NR occupied the school and conducted search operations over the village. They wanted to arrest some local Maoist leaders in order to control the Maoist activities. They tortured many innocent people irrespective of caste/ethnicity, age or gender.

A Dalit died as a result of torture and heavy beatings by the NR, but they made false documents which claimed that the man died while falling from the hill. NR forced the headmaster, Mani Sapkota and the VDC Chairman, Lal Bahadur Pun, to sign a document to

¹⁵⁰ Gam Bahadur Sheerish is a leader of the Maoist and the Magar Liberation Front, who was trained by the Maoist ideology through his school life in pre-Maoist War. He had earlier served the people's Cultural Front and the Magar Liberation Front and now he became a regional level party leader of the Maoist. Like Ammar Rokka, he was a famous leftist teacher at the Baranja School and is still popular as the *Ammar Master*. First, he started his political carrier as a UML cadre and served as an assistant staff of his party. He became one of the ML leaders of Myagdi district when the UML split. He then joined the Maoist Party and became a first Maoist village chief of Baranja, and now a popular leader of the Maoist district committee. As he said, He was the most wanted person by the NR during the People's War.

prove that they are innocent. Both were UML cadres and they were abandoned by the Maoists when the NR left the village. They killed the headmaster (Sapkota) near-by his house for leaving school, and kept Pun imprisoned at an unknown location. After 15 days Pun was released due to the continual efforts made by the Magar women, led by his wife. Both were popular figures and commoners still think that both were not involved in that incident conducted by the NR. But the Maoist authority at the village argued with the researcher that both were supporters of the state authority against the Maoists and their activities at the village. They further said that Mani Sapkota was found guilty in their trials and that they accused him of being the leading person against the Maoists. Likewise, they concluded that Lal Bahadur Pun only helped him. However, according to the villagers and the Maoists it seems that Pun was saved for two reasons. First, he is a popular Magar activist and the village is Magar dominated, and there are many Magars in the Maoists too. Second, he is relatively straight-forward and not a man who could conspire against them. In contrast, Sapkota received the death penalty as the Maoists thought that he was the master-mind of the UML politics and the major obstacle of the Maoist activities in the village. Although many villagers and even some teachers didn't want to talk openly about the event due to threats from the Maoists, most of them thought that Sapkota was innocent. Maoists controlled the village through guns and threats rather than by convincing the people through peaceful means. Therefore, it seemed that almost all the people were supposed to be the followers of the Maoists. However, they quietly opposed the Maoists and supported the political parties and their ideologies.

The people of Baranja actively participated in the April revolution through mass demonstrations. Political activists had a crucial role in mobilising the people towards these democratic mass movements. Moreover, the Maoists in the village mobilised the villagers to join their programmes organised in and outside the village. On his first visit to the village, immediately after the *janandolan-II*, most of the people felt uncomfortable in expressing their attitudes about the contemporary politics with the researcher. He visited the village a second time after a month and found a favorable political ecology mainly due to the end of the Maoist war and the signing of a peace accord between the government and the Maoists. Therefore, respondents openly discussed such matters. The Maoists allowed conducting development activities; the researcher also participated in one of these activities. The programme was organised to celebrate the connection of electric power lines in the village which was the first development aid extended by the government in the village. They dug two holes to erect the poles in order to extend the electric power lines in the village. The delegates, user groups and the villagers participated in the programme. This was the first public programme organized by the government after the conflict. Activists from different parties utilised this favourable environment and actively participated in the programme.

People gathered in the place where the holes were to be dug for two poles. A musical team also arrived with their instruments and a young activist brought a goat in order to sacrifice for good luck. Once the villagers dug up the holes, the VDC's Chairman Lal Bahadur Pun Magar, who was also a Shaman, the priest of the Magars in the village, led the worshipping

along with a Brahmin priest. They held a religious ceremony together in the names of all their gods and goddess, whatever was believed in the village. Then the Shaman sacrificed a goat with a big knife close to the holes and threw the blood into the holes. This performance was conducted in order to save the village and its people from known and unknown disasters and ghosts, particularly any future harm from the electric power. It was an occasion for all to get together in one place despite their differences in political ideologies. They danced and sang a song with the music playing in the background. All seemed pleased and happy to work together. People expressed their happiness with a hearty welcome to visitors and official persons in the village and invited them to join the programme, i.e. representative of the consultancy, members of the user group and the researcher too. People in general prayed for peace, progress and development in the village. At last, after the worshipping performance, they all participated in the feast and drink. Undoubtedly, this was the symbol of social harmony which is found commonly in the villages. Therefore, the researcher also wished for peace, tranquility, and development in this village so that they might peacefully coexist with their different identities, and encouraged the activists to keep the social harmony for ever.

The Magar Political Activist at Baranja Village

Amar Rokka is a senior Magar activist of the Branaj VDC and the Myagdi district as well. He said that he belonged to 54 Magar house-holds. In the beginning, nine families first came from the west hills called Rolpa in order to settle here, and later they were fragmented into 54 households (*chaunna kuriya* Magars). According to his personal records, breaking the 54 house-holds in 2000, the Magars grew to 281, and now there are 300 house-holds. Therefore, the original as well as major inhabitants of the Baranja village are Magars from fifty-four households, who have still their own distinct identity and are different from other settlers whether they are Brahmin, Chhetri, Dalits or other Magars. According to him, it has been thirteen generations since their ancestors came here.

The 54 original house-holds of Magars in Baranja have their own culture called *Agho Dheu* or *Dhule Mela*. Only Magars from these households are allowed to participate and perform in this festival. Even the women from these households are not allowed to join this programme. The major themes of the festival are to avoid evil things and disease, and to pray for good crops and farming. Actually, they perform this *jatra* each year at the end of the farming season and after harvesting the crops. Since some years back they have been sacrificing a male goat instead of the oxen which was used in earlier practice, and stopped this practice due to threats of the state authority, particularly in the Panchayat. Now some villagers began to eat OX and Cow with the Maoists used to it. The whole religious performance is done by a *Jhakri* (Shaman). First, the *Jhakri* makes the *Paundur*, adding a hair of cow or oxen as a symbol of the Oxen inside the temple. When the secret offering is finished they then sacrifice the male goat and chicken and offer a feast to all members of the 54 households. During the festival, they all dance and drink together to enjoy the occasion.

Amar Rokka is an experienced man in terms of politics, education and social reforms. After he passed the SLC he started to teach in the village school. When he was a student he had come in contact with a left-wing teacher called Som Bahadur Bogati who encouraged him to become a leftist activist. He had 13 years' teaching experiences. During his teaching time, he met Nar Bahadur BC who was the headmaster at the school and who also played a decisive role in disseminating the leftwing and communist ideology. He himself was affiliated with UML, the soft-left political party, while the headmaster was an extreme leftist who believed in Maoism. He had some differences with the Head-master and therefore left his teaching post and became a full-time political activist. For some time he became the office secretary in Myagdi district office of the CPN UML but after two years he left the official responsibility and UML party and became an independent activist and social reformist. As a dissident member of the original settlement of Magars, he opposes any unjust activities found in the local village and works tirelessly to spread educational and political awareness. Hence, despite his earlier orientation to a leftwing ideology, he always favours the people in general, particularly the poor, the oppressed and the suppressed.

In 1999 he came in contact with Gam Bahadur Shreesh, who was affiliated with the Maoist party and MNLF and who advised him to join the ethnic liberation movement initiated by the MNLF and the Maoist party. As a result of this request he joined and became active in the Maoist party. However, the Maoist presence in the village significantly increased violent acts, such as blasting the VDC office, seizing the houses and lands of some people, and some physical actions conducted against those who tried to oppose either their demands or ideology. Due to the increasing activities of the Maoists in Baranja village, the state sent troops in order to suppress them. NR appeared for the first time in this village in 2058 Mansir. In the name of Maoist suppression, they started to oppress the villagers and established a temporary base camp at the high school of Baranja. The state army started to search local Maoist leaders and activists, but they had already fled to the forest. Being unable to find them, NR tortured some innocent people and the high school teachers as they suspected their involvement in the Maoist party. The head master, Krishan Sapkota, was also badly beaten and arrested for a day. They also destroyed the personal properties and civilian houses through so-called searching operations. Amar Rokka was a well-known man in Beni bazaar and was famous throughout the district. He was popularly known as Amar sir (Amare Master). Due to his affiliation with the UML and the Maoists, NR wanted to capture him. NR came to his hamlet, and when they didn't find him they beat his wife, destroyed his house and crops and looted black grams. At that time he was just a general member of the CPN Maoist and MNLF. After this incident, he left his house and devoted himself to the Maoist party as a full-time activist. Now he works as a DCM of the Maoist party and a chair of its sister organization, i.e. the teachers' association

There was one particular event during the war between the Maoists and the NR which Amar Rokka says he will never forget. This event was an encounter with the NR when he was in Tharakan village of Myagdi district along with other Maoists mobilising the villagers for their cause. When the NR knew that the Maoists were in the village, they surrounded the

village. Twenty two Maoists including some militias decided to fight with the eighteen gunmen from the state. Rokka was in one of the houses with a small group including Harka Bahadur Rokka and Kaman Singh with guns. There was no time to contact other Maoist friends. Therefore, on the advice of two gun men, he left the shelter and went to cross the river knowing that the state troops were nearby. No one opened the fire and he was able to cross the river safely. When his friends saw that he crossed the river and was safe, they opened fire. All Maoists with guns started firing; therefore there was a huge cross fire between the Maoist militias and the state armies-NR. If either side had opened fire before Rokka had arrived safely across the river, he might have been killed. Indeed, some of his friends lost their lives in that incident thereby saving the lives of the Maoist leaders.

Gradually, through the evaluation of his activeness in the party and his devotion and hard work, Rokka achieved and gained a lot of responsibilities in the Maoist party. First, he became the chief of the Maoist *Jana sarkar* in his village. After that he got the responsibility to look after the Maoist teacher association of Myagdi and became an executive member in the district committee of the Maoist party in Myagdi. He thought the Maoist party was well-suited to his personal philosophy and that of people like him. Throughout his life he opposed the feudal elites who almost always oppressed, suppressed and exploited the people in general, including the Magars in his locality. As a Magar activist, he favoured more rights, power and progress for Magars in rural areas. He said that Magars are marginalised and excluded in the village polity where the outsiders particularly Chhetri migrants from west, Khasan and Thakali from the east dominated the power and resources. The contemporary political atmosphere created after Janandolan-II, he believed, is the right time for putting forward the political, economic, social and cultural interests of Magars. Hence, he believed that the Maoists offered the means for their emancipation, promising to provide an ethnic autonomous state with the Magarant federalism for the Magars. At the same time, he didn't forget that the other groups, who are marginalised and poverty stricken, should also be granted their basic needs along with representation in the polity. In this regard, he further stated that the PR system is fine in order to participate in state affairs, either at the central or the local level. Therefore, it seemed that he was fully convinced that if the CPN Maoist took over the state power, then almost all ethnic conflicts and other problems would be resolved properly and systematically.

Although Magars are in the majority in the Baranja village and in Myagdi district, as Amar said, most of the time they had no representation. Thakali and Chhetri effectively were in charge and enjoying the power in this Magar territory. Magars are innocent and straightforward people; they don't know how to play political games or acquire political power and representation in the state affairs. Rokka also said that Magars are responsible for their low participation in the polity. Magars tend to drink more alcohol and often don't give priority to education, prefer foreign jobs and their household work. Therefore, Magar activists realised that Thakalis controlled the power and property in the Magar villages by providing drinks and meat to Magars. Thakalis are traders by their ethnic character and possess a lot of property. They also rule over the villages and district even though they are the ethnic

minority in each village of Myagdi. However, he stated that the political equation has changed since 1990, particularly due to the Maoist activism and their support for Magar representation and involvement in politics. He has also explored ways to develop Baranja village politically and physically along with measures to promote political representation and state of development. As a researcher, he conducted studies and jointly published a book called 'Baranjako Kosheli'. According to him, through the first parliamentary election in 1959, the Nepali Congress had influence in upper Baranja and the Praja Parisad in lower Baranja. Likewise, in the referendum of 1980, there were only 13 votes in favour of the multiparty system and rest of the votes went to a party-less Panchayat system. In the local election held in 1992, RPP got 978 seats followed by the UML with 571 and the NC with 158 seats. Similarly, in 1997's local election, although the UML succeeded in rewiring the position of chairman and some other members of the VDC board, RPP secured the majority of representation on the board. In the general election of 1999, UML won 1002 followed by RPP with 600 and NC with 200. Since the election in 1997, the UML has increased its influence, therefore, it has a leading role in politics in this village. During the Maoist conflict, Baranja was under Maoist control and since then their influence has gradually increased among the villagers. Therefore, Maoists have become the prominent power-holder in the village. However, the UML and the Maoists are the two major parties in Baranja in terms of mobilising the Magars.

Due to the spread of Maoist activities from the west Kham region to Myagdi district, people expected some socio-economic and political changes in their life and society. The existing political parties like the UML, RPP and NC had been unsuccessful in bringing these changes. Therefore, only the Maoist party could manage the crises and fulfill the demands of the people at the grass-roots level transform the society. Due to this reason, people are inclined to support the Maoist party and it has significantly gained popularity among the Magars in Myagdi. As a result, Maoists have succeeded in representing the Myagdi district in the Constituent Assembly through the FPTP system and PR system. A senior Magar activist called Gam Bahadur Shreesh Magar is representing the Magars through the PR list. There is one seat in the district for direct election for which the Maoist party has succeeded in sending its candidate in the CA. In the Magar dominated territory, a non-Magar candidate forwarded by the Maoist won the election defeating the Magar candidacies presented by other parties. However, according to Amar Rokka, the Magars from Myagdi expected and hoped that the Maoist party will do better for their society and state through their overall transformation in the economy, political and social conditions. This will benefit not only the Magars but also the general people and their basic needs will be met. Ethnic people including Magars will be sovereign in their historical territory and attain political representation through the Magar ethnic autonomous federal state. The Maoist party has socialized the villagers, particularly its supporters; during the Maoist People's War in such a way that they believe such transformation is possible.

Appendix-11

Questionnaires

The Magars in Politics: A Study of the Palpa, Kaski and Myagdi Districts

Note: Please help to complete the questionnaire form appropriately by answering the following questions. – Uma Nath Baral, Ph D Candidate

A. Demography of Respondent

I) Place of Resident

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|-----------|
| 1) Rural, | 2) Urban, |
| (Name of VDC/Municipality :.....) | |

II) Clan

- | | |
|-----------------------|-----------|
| 1) Thapa, | 2) Rana, |
| 3) Ale, | 4) Pun, |
| 5) Gharti, | 6) Rokka, |
| 7) Bhudha/Bhudhathoki | |

III) Age Group

- | | |
|---------------|-------------|
| 1) 18 -30, | 2) 31-45, |
| 3) 46-60, and | 4) 60 above |

IV) Level of Education

- | | |
|-----------------|----------------------------|
| 1) Illiterate, | 2) Literate, |
| 3) High School, | 4) Intermediate, |
| 5) Bachelor, | 6) Master Degree and above |

V) Possession of Land and Property:

In rural areas

- | | |
|--------------------|-------------------|
| 1) 10 ropani below | 2) 11 – 20 ropani |
| 3) 20-40 ropani | 4) Above 40 |

In urban areas

- | | |
|-------------------|-------------------|
| 1) 1 ropani below | 2) 1-3 ropani |
| 3) 3-5 ropani and | 4) Above 5 ropani |

VI) Family background:

- 1) Ex-army (British / India)
- 2) Mukhiya / Jimmuwal,
- 3) Peasant
- 4) Business/ Service, and

- 5) Other.... (Civil Job in Foreign)
- VII) Profession/ Occupation of Respondent:
- 1) Ex-army/Police (British, India)
 - 2) Government Service,
 - 3) Employee in Public and Private Sector
 - 4) Foreign civil job
 - 5) Social/Political Service
 - 6) Peasant / Housewife
 - 7) Student
- VIII) Religion:
- 1) Hindu
 - 2) Buddha
 - 3) Animism-Shamanism
 - 4) Christian
 - 5) Nastik
- IX) Do you speak your Mother Tongue?
- 1) Yes
 - 2) No
 - 3) A little bit
- X) Background of Respondent:
- 1) Activist
 - 2) Non-activist
- XI) Gender:
- 1) Male
 - 2) Female
- XII) District:
- 1) Kaski
 - 2) Myagdi
 - 3) Palpa

B. Content Questions

- 1) Did you participate in any following election?
 - 1) General election in 1991,
 - 2) General election in 1994,
 - 3) General election in 1999,
 - 4) Local election in 1992,
 - 5) Local election in 1997
 - 6) Did not cast
2. (If yes), To which candidate did you cast the vote?
 - 1) Political party,
 - 2) Own ethnicity
 - 3) Relative / friend,
 - 8) Don't know
3. Did you participate in the people's movement-2062/2063 (April, 2006)?
 - 1) Yes,
 - 2) No
4. (If yes), Why did you participate (any two)?

- 1) For democracy,
- 2) Called by Political Party,
- 3) Request by friends / relatives,
- 4) Sent by Maoist,
- 7) Request by Ethnic Organization
- 8) Don't know

5. What do you mean by Democracy (any two)?
 - 1) Liberty and Equality,
 - 2) People's representative government and party system,
 - 3) Rule of Law,
 - 4) Inclusiveness,
 - 5) Peace, Security and Development,
 - 6) Republic system,
 - 7) Conflict and instability (negative sense)
 - 8) Don't know
6. Which Government did you like most in post 1991?
 - 1) N C – Deupa gov. 1995
 - 2) N C –GP's gov. 1991
 - 3) R P P – Chan's gov. 1997
 - 4) U M L – MM's gov. 1994
 - 5) No one
 - 8) Don't know
7. What do you think about present government? (Evaluate the present government)

1) Not bad	2) Good
3) Very Good	4) Bad
5) Worse	6) Worst
8) Don't know	
8. What is your evaluation towards democracy in Nepal?

1) It is needed	2) It is not needed
8) Don't know	
9. What is your Opinion towards Monarchy?
 - 1) Constitutional / Ceremonial Monarchy,
 - 2) Absolute Monarchy
 - 3) Republic Democracy
 - 8) Don't know
10. Are you a member/supporter of any Political Party?

1) Yes	2) No
--------	-------
11. Which Political Party do you favour?

1) NC	2) NC – D
3) NCP – Maoist	4) NCP – UML
5) People's Front (janamorch)	
6) People's Salvation (janamukti)	

- 7) RPP 8) Other- Samata

12. Are you involved in any sister organization of Political Party?

1) Yes 2) No

13. How often you participate in the programmes of Political party and Sister Organization?

1) Regular 2) Sometimes

3) Not participate 8) Don't know

14. Why do you like that party/sister organization (any three)? (Factors motivating people towards Political Party)

1) Principle 2) Leaders

3) History 4) Documents / publications

5) Activities 6) Relatives/Friends

7) Other...(family background)

8) Don't know

15. Have you ever you heard Maoist people's war?

1) Yes 2) No

8) Don't know

16. In your opinion what is/are the cause/causes of this war (any three)?

1) Unemployment and Poverty

2) Corruption and Misgovernance

3) Government's Suppression

4) Exclusionary State

5) Maoist's desire for Power

6) Royal massacre

8) Don't know

17. How can the Maoist conflict be solved (any three)? (Settlement of Dispute)

1) Peace Negotiation

2) Employment and Proportional Development

3) Coalition Government including Maoist

4) Election for Constituent Assembly

5) Proportional Representation and Inclusionary State

6) Republic State

8) Don't know

18) Do you know about the existence of Magar organization?

1) Yes 2) No

19. (If yes), In which Organization are you affiliated?

1) Nepal Magar Sangh

- 2) Pun Society
- 3) Both – 1 and 2
- 4) Magar Liberation Front
- 5) Not affiliated with any organization

20. (If Yes), How often do you participate in the programmes of that organization?
- 1) Regular 2) Sometimes
 - 3) Not participated
21. Do you know the policies/programmes of your own affiliated (Magar) organization? (Knowledge on affiliated organization)
- 1) Yes 2) No
22. (If Yes), Tell some Policies/Programmes (any three)?
- 1) Conservation and promotion of Magar culture and identity
 - 2) Education and Awareness for Magar
 - 3) Unity and Cooperation among Magars
 - 4) Reforms against bad practices
 - 5) Upliftment and Development of Magar Community
 - 6) Settlement of Ethnic Problems
 - 7) Empower to Magar
 - 8) Don't know
23. Do you know Ethnic Autonomy?
- 1) Yes 2) No
24. Do you Support?
- 1) Yes 2) No
 - 8) Don't know
25. (If Yes/NO), What do you mean by Magar Autonomy?
- 1) Gain of Ethnic Rights
 - 2) Educational, Social, Economic and Political Development
 - 3) Development of Magar Culture and Language
 - 4) Magar Autonomous Republic
 - 5) Against Social harmony and National integration (negative sense)
 - 8) Don't know
26. Which level of participation in state from Magar ethnicity do you find?
- 1) Well 2) Few
 - 8) Don't know
27. How to increase Magars' participation in Polity (any three)?
- 1) Education and Political awareness
 - 2) Unity among the Magars
 - 3) Give up bad culture and bad trends
 - 4) Reservation
 - 5) End of ethnic indiscrimination and policy for empowerment

- 6) Employment and Development for Magar regions
 - 7) Proportional Representation in accordance with population
 - 8) Don't know
28. Which structure do you prefer for the interest of Ethnic strata of population including Magar (View on State Restructuring) (any three on priority bases)?
- 1) Ethnic Autonomy
 - 2) Local/Regional Autonomy
 - 3) Quota/Reservation System
 - 4) Magar/Ethnic Executive Head of the State
 - 5) Federal Government
 - 7) Proportional Representative System
 - 8) Don't know

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