CONTRIBUTIONS
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>
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EDUCATION IN NEPAL: MEETING OR MISSING THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS?

Elvira Graner

Education in Nepal has a number of annual highlights. One is the National Education Day, on Falgun 12th (late February), commemorating the late king Birendra's coronation address in 1975. There he proclaimed that "education constitutes the mainspring of development" (quoted in Shrestha 1989: i). Accordingly, he commanded his government to make "primary education free of cost and accessible for all, boys and girls" (ibid.). A second annual occasion addressing education is the festival *Basanta Panchami* (mid February), a day dedicated to *Saraswati*, the goddess of wisdom and learning. On that day, (Hindu) students all over the country visit temples, where they spend hours scribbling down their notes in chalk, as notes written down on this particular day will never be forgotten. While this latter day is usually celebrated and characterised by its festive mood, the National Education Day is simply being "observed" (Khadka 1997: 12), and it is a rather ambivalent affair, or even a gloomy one, and indicative for the (poor) state of education in Nepal. Some authors even find stronger expressions, as Khadka in his cynical article "Celebrating the pathetic state" (ibid.), or Shanta Dixit (2002), in her critical assessment "Education, deception, state, and society" (2002).

Further regular events when education "hits" the headlines are in March/April when class 10 students need to take the final examinations of their secondary education in order to obtain their school-leaving certificates (SLC), and again in June/July, when SLC-results are published. While the first one is an occasion of at least modest hope, the second is usually one of more or less great despair, as the number of failed students usually outnumber those who pass. While pass rates ranged between 30-36% during the last years (see SPOTLIGHT 2003), in 2004 an astonishingly "high" number of 46% students passed (see Amgai 2004a), and this rather dreadful result was celebrated as a major national achievement. Yet, this was partly due to re-introducing a "grace mark" system, when failures within a 5%-margin in a single subject were to be neglected (ibid.). Worse still, less than 10% of class 1 students reach class 10 (Dixit 2002: 193), and only less than 50% reach class 5 (HMG/UNCTN 2003: 15). These figures render the Millennium Development Goals, aiming at universal primary education for boys and girls and gender equity in secondary education by 2015 (HMG/UNCTN 2003: 19), meaningless paper declarations, ridiculing past policies and millions of dollars spent and wasted from donor agencies.

Another crucial feature is that the private sector is playing an increasingly important role in the Nepalese educational "landscape". By now there are

about 8,500 private schools, providing educational facilities to about 1.5 million students. These can be found all across the country, although there is a strong concentration particularly in the Kathmandu valley and in some urban centres of the Terai (HMG/MOES 2003). Private schools are usually associated with two characteristics: contributing decisively to increasing the quality of education and yet strongly criticised for charging high fees, sometimes even termed "exorbitant" (Pokharel 2003: 19). This latter charge of turning education into a lucrative business was bound to lead to a confrontation with the Maoists, as regularly pointed out in their demands, as for instance in their early 40-point demands of 1996, stating that the "commercialisation of education should be stopped" (point 35; quoted from Thapa 2003: 394).

This issue was rather forcefully addressed when the Maoist-affiliated "student organisation" (All Nepal National Free Student Union, Revolutionary, ANNFSU-R) imposed several strikes upon all types of educational institutions during December 2002 and January 2003, aiming at pressurising private schools to reduce their fees (see Dhakal 2002b, Amgai 2002d, Amgai 2004d). A settlement was reached in January 2003 with PABSON (Private and Boarding Schools Organization of Nepal), agreeing to reduce fees in its member schools by 10-30% (Amgai 2004b). Consistent with these ideas, private schools have been targeted, physically attacked, and even closed in many rural areas, and occasionally also in the Kathmandu valley. On the other hand, Maoists have even more frequently targeted teachers and students from rural government schools by taking them hostage (Upadhyay 2004). In addition, many teachers have been approached for extortions, or have even been manslaughtered, as was the case with Mukti Nath Adhikari from Lamjung in 2002, who was stabbed and handed in front of his students, or Gyanendra Khadka who was hacked to death in Sindhupalchok in August 2003 (see Dhakal 2004a: 22). About 160 teachers from both sides have been killed, by Maoists as well as government forces, and about 3,000 have been displaced, seeking shelter either in district headquarters or in the capital (ibid.). These latter agitations have led to a petition from the side of five students submitted to the Supreme Court in February 2004, complaining that their "right to education was being violated by the string of strikes (bandh)" and appealing to the court to force political parties and student unions to stop these practices (ibid. 22). Similarly, the UN has demanded that educational institutions should be deemed "Zones of Peace" (Upadhyay 2004).

This brief introduction may suffice to show that education in Nepal has many facets. It is not only an affair between the state and its junior citizens and their parents, but it is also a highly (party) political issue, and also a business. This article addresses a number of critical issues pertaining to education. It will give a brief introduction to education policies during the last 50 years, highlighting the main objectives of these policies and critically assessing their achievements and failures. The article will identify a number of crucial features, such as low enrolment rates, high drop-out rates, and low performance in examinations, and assess their validity as indicators. In addition, it also provides a "mapping" of gender and regional disparities at a national level, based on data from the Ministry of Education (for the 1990s), supplemented by unpublished district-level data (for Jhapa district). The article then addresses the lack of achievement, identifying the "culprits" and political battlefields. It also provides some suggestions for policies, by (re-) considering "stakeholders" and their potential roles.

Educational Policies in Nepal: A Brief Outline

Education lies at the core of human development. As such, it is also a fundamental human right and thus, providing education to its citizens needs to be a focus of government activities all across the world, irrespective of the state of development. In addition, many international agencies, particularly UNESCO and UNICEF have drafted global educational agendas, as for instance during the world conference on "Education For All" held in Jomtien (Thailand) in 1990. There, all member states – including Nepal – have agreed upon the need to translate these international agendas into national policies. A more recent framework is the "Millennium Declaration", signed in 2000 and now synthesised into the "Millennium Development Goals" (HMG/UNCTN 2003: 1). This aims to "achieve universal primary education" and to "ensure that by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary education" (ibid: 15). At the same time, Nepal's country report states that "given the current rate of progress [..] it is unlikely that Nepal will achieve universal access to primary education by 2015" (ibid.). Thus, it is obvious that there still exist vast gaps between "paper declarations" and social realities in many fields, and education is certainly among the most blatant examples.

In Nepal, educational policies have been designed for the past 50 years, and the need for providing universal education has been targeted in virtually each of these policies. Yet, the "deadlines" for reaching this crucial goal keep being postponed, indicating not only a lack of achievement, but possibly also a lack of commitment. Thus, a large number of children, particularly girls, are still being deprived of this fundamental right. While public education was next to non-existent during the Rana period (prior to 1950) a massive initiative at promoting national education took place during Nepal's (interim) democratic phase of the 1950s. When the Nepal National Education Planning Commission (NNEPC) handed in its report in 1955, it advised the government to introduce universal free primary education across the country. Education was to "reach all the people, not just a few" (quoted in Joshi 2003: 33). They also addressed the need that "education must be compulsory, so

that indifferent parents can not deprive their children of the benefits of education" (ibid: 92; quoted in Joshi 2003: 33). In order to implement these goals, they suggested a three-phase model, having 25% (300,000) of all children in primary schools by 1965; introducing voluntary universal primary education by 1975 and making it compulsory by 1985.

These policy guidelines have had a tremendous impact upon bringing children to school. When a UNESCO team assessed the state of education in Nepal in the early 1960s, the two authors H.B. Wood and Bruno Knall documented that by 1961 a total of 176,701 students all across the country were enrolled in primary schools alone and an additional 27,000 students in secondary schools (ibid. 1962: 33ff), with an astonishingly and admirably high number of girls (71,079 i.e., 38%). This implies an astronomical increase within a single decade, as student enrolment was below 10,000 in 1951 (ibid.). Some of the success was based on a wide communal involvement, as the NNEPC had advised the government to directly involve local communities in financing primary education. On the other hand, a point of critical assessment in their report was the extremely poor result and "human wastage" which went along with expanding education (see below), with extremely high drop-outs between primary and secondary education, but similarly within primary education. Thus, the universalisation of primary education was far from being achieved in 1975, and of more concern, this lack has continued to the present day.

A new attempt to improve educational standards was undertaken at the occasion of the Silver Jubilee of the Panchayat System, when HMG launched its "Basic Needs Fulfilment Programme" aimed at reducing poverty by the year 2000. This programme addressed five quantifiable indicators, i.e. food, clothing, housing, education, health, and the qualitative category "security" (see also Graner 1997: 92/93). Regarding education, the programme set the target that literacy was to be raised from 29.9% to 39.9% and that primary school enrolment was to be made universal, increasing from 82.78% of the 6-10 age group (1984/85) to 87% (1990), 95% (1995) and finally 100% by the year 2000, when a total number of 2,928,984 primary school children was projected (HMG/NPC 1987: 27ff). As a matter of fact, there have been quite impressive results in promoting students' enrolment. Numbers more than doubled during the 1980s (see Figure 1, for detailed figures see Table A1, appendix) and increased further during the 1990s, both for boys and girls. On the other hand, enrolment of girls is still lagging far behind. Besides, there are vast regional disparities (see below).

Figure 1: Number of Boy and Girl Students (1986 –2001)

data sources: HMG/MoE&S (1990 onwards)
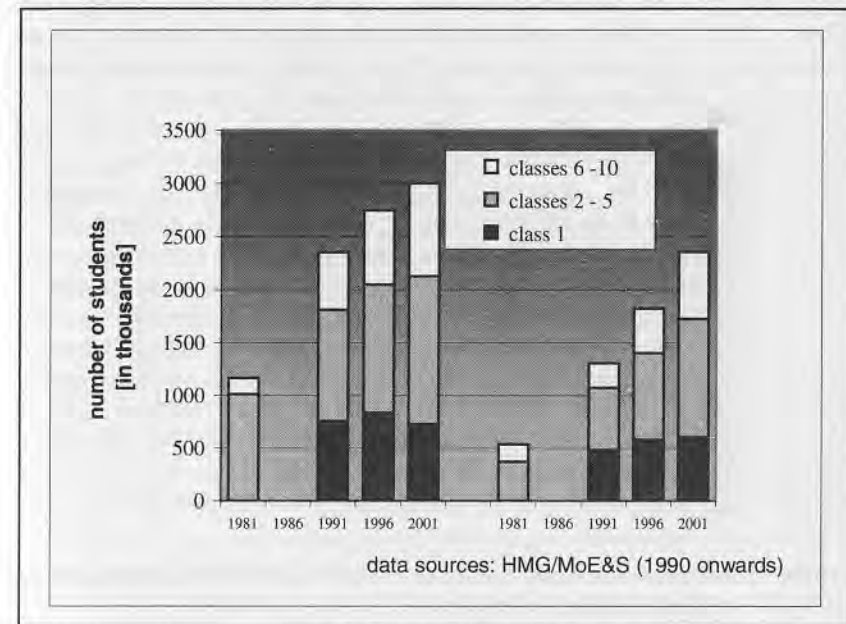
The BNFP follows the lines of the previous Five-Year-Plans, which all stated rather ambitious objectives and only a few (minor) obstacles to be overcome. On the other hand, a much more critical assessment of primary education was written in the same year by Shrestha, who (also) points out that "investment in primary education [y]ields the highest rate of return [..]". At the same time, he critically assumes that "planners in Nepal do not seem to understand this basic formula of development" (1989: 94). He continues to argue that too little of the national budget is spent on education, and even within education too little is being spent on primary education whereas the lion's share is given to "a few privileged students" in higher education, an "undemocratic act" and a basic flaw in the conception of primary education which needs to be changed before launching any programme of universal primary education (ibid.). Another point of criticism was the low quality, stating that "experience up to 1979/80 indicated that the grade 3 completers were virtually semi-literate" (ibid: 283). One immediate reaction in order to counteract this latter shortcoming was to extend primary education, from previously class 1 to 3 up to class 5 from 1980 onwards.

In order to improve the educational situation, Nepal was regularly granted major international assistance, for instance from UNICEF for its "Education for Girls and Women in Nepal", signed in 1983. In this case, HMG's

contribution was to provide the recurrent salaries for teachers and lecturers, and UNICEF's contribution comprised of about 5 million US $ (see Joshi 2003: 116ff). The most recent and much higher budgeted initiative is the so-called Basic and Primary Education Project (BPEP), where several donors joined hands and funds (mainly grants, see Table 1). This project aimed at improving access to schools, improving the quality of education and strengthening the administration (for details see Bajracharya & Phuyal 2000; Joshi 2003: 151ff). Activities for access comprised of expanding opportunities for non-formal education for women and girls, and a provision for out-of-school children, as non-attendance is seen as one of the major obstacles. In addition, the number of female teachers was to be increased, and community awareness programmes were to be launched. Quality was to be improved through textbook and curriculum development, in-service teacher training, and by introducing early childhood education in formal schooling (see Bajracharya & Phuyal 2000: 29ff). From the government side, 14% of the national budget was to allocated for education, yet only 55.4% for primary education (HMG/NPC/CBS & UNFPA 2003: 216). Yet, irrespective of these substantial financial inputs, improvements have been slow, to put it mildly.

Table 1: Budget Allocations from Different Donors within the Basic and Primary Education Project

Donor agencies and contribution (in Mio. US $)	Type	Phase I (1992-1998)	Phase II (1999-2004)
IDA	loan	30.6	12.5 (WB)
DANIDA	grant	16.3	44.1
UNICEF	grant	4.6	5.0
JICA	grant (in kind)	15.7	-
European Union	grant	-	20.0
FINNIDA	grant	-	5.0
NORAD	grant	-	23.5
Total	*	67.2	110.1

Source: Joshi 2003, 151ff

The Current Situation: Impressive Results and Misleading Statistics
Educational statistics document that policy targets have been met, and in some cases even exceeded. Thus, they seem to indicate that education in Nepal is rapidly progressing, leaving only a few regions which need to "catch up". On the other hand, these statistics are based on a number of flaws, which are apparent when further disaggregated. These comprise of a disproportionately high number of class 1 students, which indicates that "primary" education is often "class 1-only" education, as argued elsewhere

(see Graner 1998). Secondly, cohort analysis is often inappropriate, which results in gross distortions of enrolment figures. Thirdly, enrolment figures are usually based on admission at the beginning of the year, rather than documenting "real" attendance. Taking these issues into full account, it becomes obvious that enrolment is meager, rendering policies of "universal education" meaningless paper declarations. Fourthly, education is characterized by an utterly poor performance in examinations in many classes, particularly in classes 1, 5, 8 and 10 (see below).

When considering enrolment in primary education it is apparent that a disproportionately high number of students are enrolled in class 1 (see Figure 2). This most bizarre "pyramid" is apparent both among boys and girls and indicates that drop-outs are not only pronounced between primary and secondary education but also within primary education. Thus, at a national average, class 5 students account for less than half of the numbers of class 1 students. While this peculiar pattern could be interpreted as a most recent rise in class 1 admissions, its persistence over many years (see Figure 1, above) renders such an interpretation out of question (see also Graner 1998). School enrolment rates have two further distinctive features: firstly, high gender disparities and secondly, high regional disparities. Enrolment rates of girls until today lag far behind those of boys (see Figures 2 and 3). Above all, in many rural Terai and mountain districts of the mid and far western regions, drop-outs increase linearly for boys but exponential for girls, as for instance in Doti (see Figure 3). Thus, in quite a few districts class 1 girls account for 30-50% of all girls enrolled in school (analysis based on HMG/MOES 2003).

Enrolment rates are a crucial indicator in order to assess participation in education. These rates are usually based on a "cohort" analysis, relating the number of school children to a particular age group. In the case of primary students, this cohort is defined as children aged 6-10. Yet, in a context where over- as well as under-aged children account for a substantial number of children, such an analysis is analytically meaningless. Thus, in 2001 "gross" enrolment rates ranged between 72-229% (as in Mahottari and Taplejung, respectively), as documented in the annual Educational Statistics (HMG/MOE&S 2003: 245ff). This distortion is corrected by differentiating gross and net enrolment rates, the later ranging between 43 and 98% (39 to 98% for girls; ibid.). Yet, the precise calculations remain vague, as proper cohorts are difficult to enumerate. An attempt was made, based on data from the Population Census 2001 (see Figures 2 and 3). This documents that under-enrolment of girls starts in primary classes, in Doti even from class 3 onwards. Even then, net enrolment rates are extremely low, and are below 50% in a total of 9 districts, in the far western as well as in the central development region (see map, Figure 5).

Case studies indicate that ages in primary classes frequently vary over 4 to 5 years, due to a substantial number of over-aged and a few number of

under-aged students. Field data from Dailekh district (see Figure 4) document that ages range from 5 to 12 for primary classes and 11 to 17 for secondary classes (Shahi 2004). Whereas there are a large number of under-aged boys in primary classes, from class 6 onwards the majority of the students are over-aged. Similarly, a case study from Okhaldhunga documents that ages usually vary about 5 years (in class 8 even 6 years), and students are as old as 18 in class 8 and 20 in class 10 (Rai 2004). An even more disparate age structure is apparent from the Nepal Living Standard Survey (data base) for 1995/96, where class 5 students range between 8 and 17, and class 9 students between 13 and 20 (HMG/NPC/CBS 1997, data base).

Figure 2: Gender-Disaggregated Enrolment and Cohorts for Class 1-10 (for 2001)
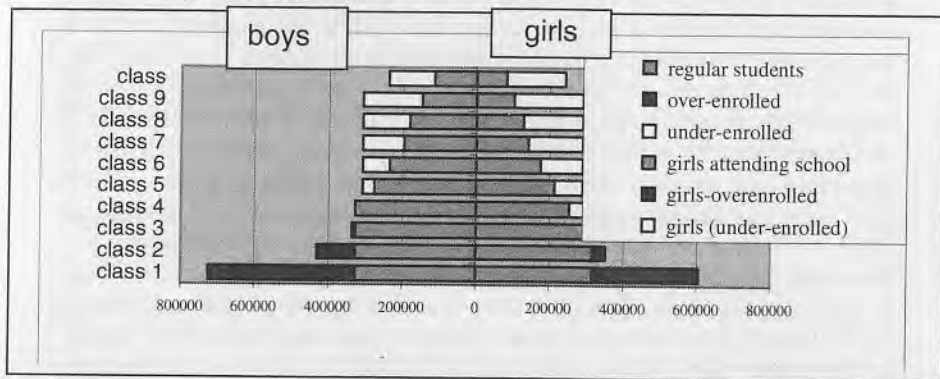

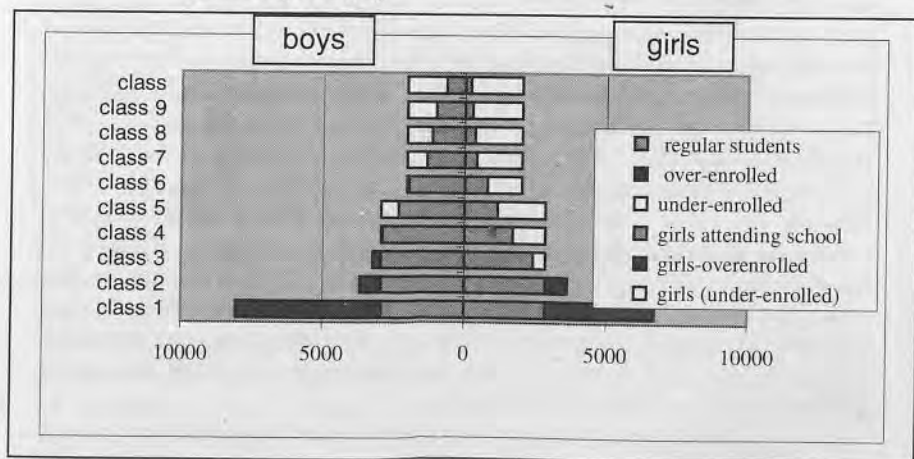**Figure 3: Gender-Disaggregated Enrolment and Cohorts for Doti District (for 2001)**

Figure 4: Girl and Boy Enrolment and Age Structure at a Dailekh School (For 2004)
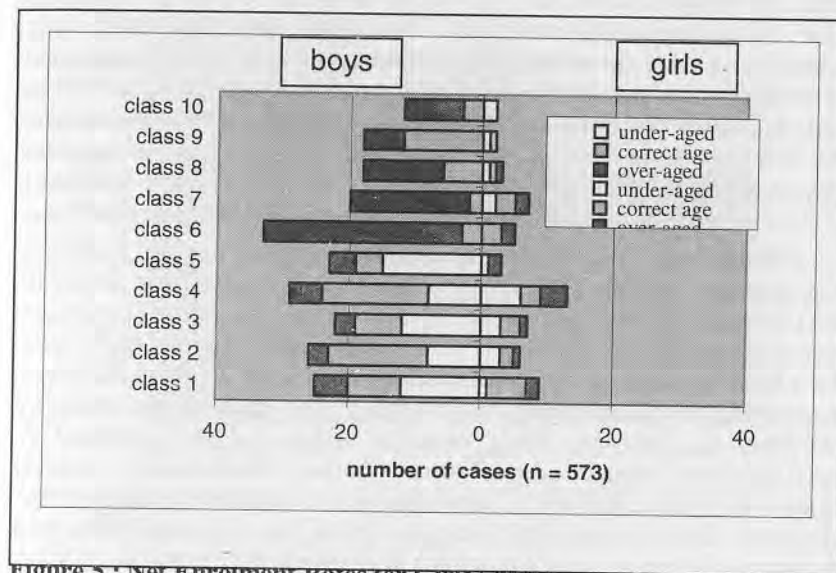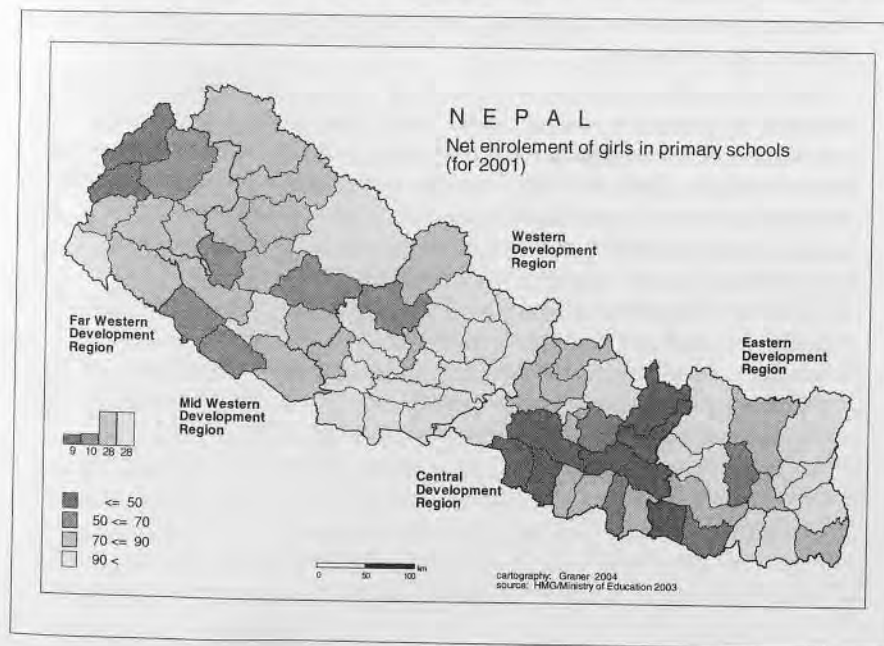

Figure 5 : Net Enrolment Rates for Girls (2001)

Thirdly, educational statistics are distorted in a further way. Enrolment rates are usually based on admission at the beginning of the school year, which does not necessarily coincide with actual attendance during the remaining year. This is apparent from field data from Jhapa district (for 1998), where admissions exceed the number of students participating in the examinations of the respective year by about 10-20%. In class 1, more than 30% of the girls and about 25% of the boys were "paper work" rather than real students. As Jhapa is one of the country's "top" districts with regard to education, disproportions are likely to be more pronounced in other districts, particularly in rural areas of the Terai and in the mid and far western hills and mountains.

Fourthly, these data also document a further crucial feature. Failures in examinations are quite pronounced in most classes, particularly during the first three and the fifth year of primary and in classes 8 and 10 of secondary school, again in spite of Jhapa's favourable overall position. These issues have been addressed in many analyses (see CERID 1987; 1991), and there is a surprisingly high consistency over the years. One of the earliest example is the Wood-Knall Report (1962) where the authors critically addressed the need to reduce "human wastages", both of human resources and government funds. While pass rates in SLC varied between 46 and 60% during the 1950s (ibid: 42), rates had ironically been higher during the 1930s and 1940s, prior to the massive extension of educational facilities (at about 60%; ibid.). Wood & Knall calculated the investments per student and argued that the total losses in government expenditures were quite substantial, at about 10 million NRs for the 1950s (ibid).

Wood & Knall attributed these high rates of failure to the "present obsolete examination system" (ibid: 43). They argued that examinations during secondary schooling were only carried out at the end of the entire 5-year period, i.e. after class 10. Thus, the consultants advised the government to introduce annual examinations, as this would reduce the volume of each examination. In addition, this system would allow for better tuition as well as for advising weaker students to discontinue their schooling (ibid.: 43/44). While the examination system was changed long ago, the number of students passing has still not increased, indicating that the obstacles obviously lie elsewhere. In addition, Shanta Dixit raises concerns about the "learning" capabilities of those students who do pass, as examinations test "memorization abilities" rather than understanding (2002: 202).

Figure 6: Enrolment and Examination Results in Jhapa (for 1998)

number of cases (data source: District Education Office, Chandragadhi) Graner 2002
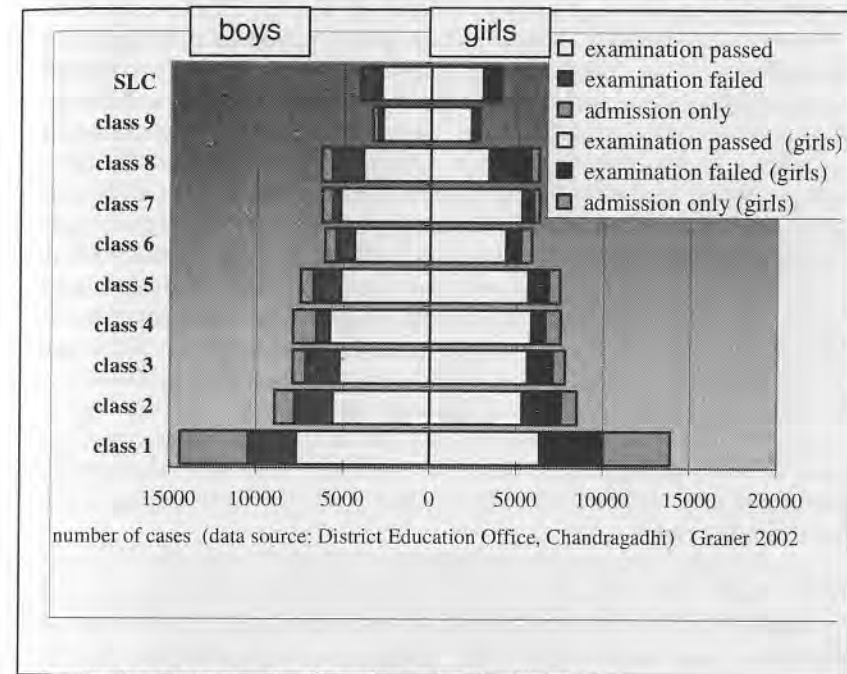
Lack of Achievements: Searching for the Culprits

The low pass rates of examinations, particularly during SLC, is one of the most crucial issues in education. During 2000-2003, an average of 30-35% of all students passed. Accordingly, highly concerned articles about "Poor examination results: Who is to blame" (Dhakal 2001c) or "SLC results: Poor pass rate" (SPOTLIGHT 2001b), are a regular annual feature of both newspapers and magazines, after the publication of SLC results in June/July. In 2004, an unprecedented number (46%) passed. Yet, this "remarkable" achievement was mainly due to (re-)introducing a "grace mark" system, when failures within a 5%-margin in a single subject were to be neglected (Amgai 2004b). Whereas average figures are bad enough, in addition, regional and gender disparities are pronounced. Thus, an analysis of the 1995 results shows that Kathmandu was the only district where the number of students passed outnumbered those who failed. Among girls, only four districts had rates above 35%, whereas in almost all other areas, rates ranged between 25 and 35% in the western and eastern regions, or even 10-25% in most districts of the mid and far western regions (for map see Graner 1998: 210). Even more alarmingly, rates have further declined during the last years. Yet, these crucial figures have ceased to be documented, as the Ministry of

Education has, most unfortunately, deleted this table from its annual statistics.

Reasons for this utterly poor state of education are manifold and are also a recurrent theme in the media, political debates and academic analyses. One of the most frequently addressed topics is blaming the parents, who are usually characterised as "poor", and their "children have to supplement the income of the family", as for instance in Hada (2003: 30ff; also ibid: 2000). This "causal analysis" is closely linked to the accusation that there is a "lack of general awareness" (ibid.), as "illiteracy [.. has] made the village people unaware of the importance of sending their children to school" (ibid.). Other reasons mentioned are lack of quality instruction and lack of commitment from the side of the teachers, but also a lack of supervision. This brings about a low internal efficiency, as repetition rates are extremely high. While the latter arguments are certainly valid, Hada's analysis has two major flaws: the role of the government is completely ignored, rather teachers are perceived as extra-institutional bodies. Second, the myth about ignorant, illiterate parents reveals quite a high degree of constructed dichotomy from the perspective of Kathmandu-based educational "elites", and does not fully capture rural processes (see below).

In her critical assessment "Education, deception, state, and society" (2002), Shanta Dixit provides a much more comprehensive analysis, and finds strong words for addressing what she epitomises as the "sorry state of government education" (ibid: 193). She characterises the situation as "emphasizing literacy at the expense of education" (ibid: 194ff), and promoting "memorization skills" (ibid: 199) more than any other meaningful form of education. This, she argues, brought about the "failure to provide minimally acceptable standards" (ibid.). She also criticises the "insensitiveness from the side of the government and also its lack of commitment, as intra-administrative postings and transfers do not create an atmosphere where 'decision makers' feel responsible, a flaw prevalent at all levels of government administration. This is particularly important as there are about 100,000 teachers (i.e. about 60% of all civil servants), and thus they constitute a massive "vote bank" for party political considerations. Interestingly, she also attributes a fairly irresponsible role to the donor community who could much more efficiently pressurise government but who instead simply give "financial fodder" to the Ministry, yet "without demanding tangible results"" (ibid: 198).

As one of the most crucial issues to increase quality in education Shanta Dixit addresses the need for guaranteeing a high standard of teachers. Yet, this is not the case, and she argues that the present supervision system is completely inadequate. The crucial role of teachers has been addressed in many policies and projects. Under the BPEP's first phase (1992-1998), teacher training activities were allocated about 10 million US $ (out of 67.2

million US $). On the other hand, qualifications of teachers have remained low until today, and a large number of them are virtually untrained, as indicated in the Ministry of Education's annual statistics. This documents that more than one third of all teachers have only studied up to class 10 themselves, and, above all, have not even received any training prior to becoming teachers, mainly in government schools. Only a few among the teachers have passed their I.E. or B.A. (see Figure 7). Interestingly, and most alarmingly, hardly any among them have taken a degree in education. A disaggregation of these data based on types of schools, gender and age structure would be interesting, but data is not available at a national level. A case study from Morang district carried out by Pokharel shows that teachers' qualifications are slightly higher in private schools, particularly for men (see Figure 8). The current amendment of the Education Act addresses this shortcoming, requiring teachers to obtain licenses (see Maharjan 2004).

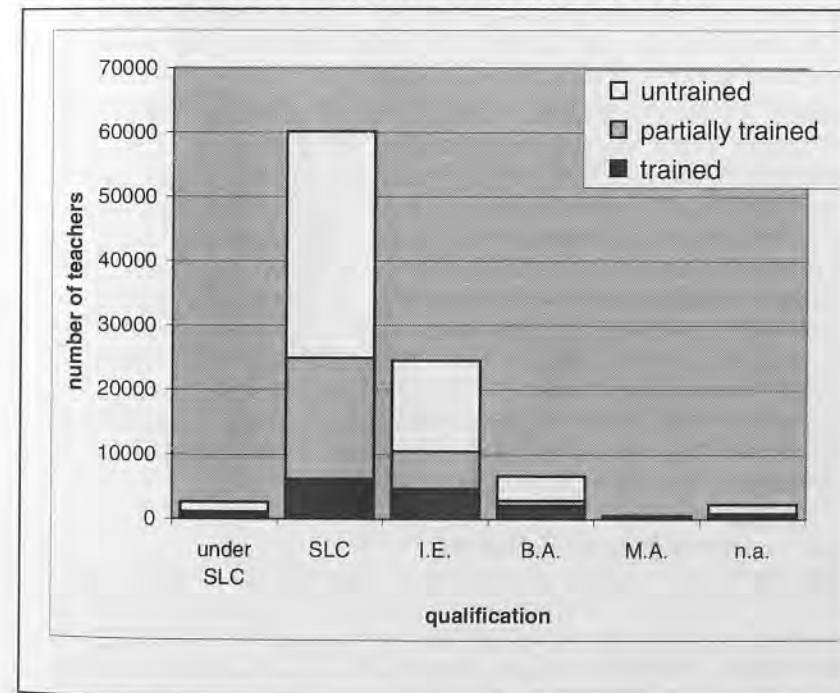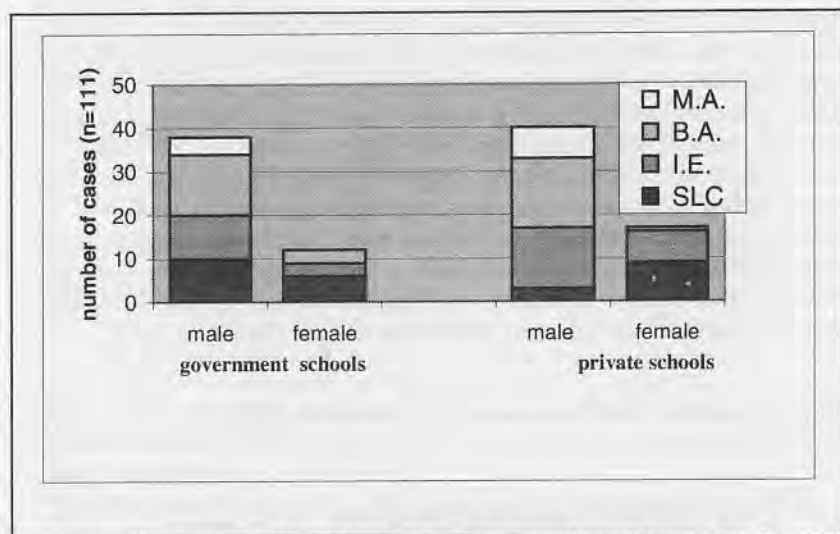**Figure 7: Teachers Qualifications (HMG/MOE for 2001)**

Figure 8: Teachers Qualifications in Morang District (Based on Pokharel 2004)

Interestingly, aspects of teachers' training were also addressed in the Wood-Knall Report. There, the authors had advised the government to establish "mobile training camps". Their main argument was the need to train teachers "in the hinterlands", as they perceived a high degree of "mobility inertia" from the side of the teachers, once they had moved to urban areas and do not wish to change their residence, except in favour of (other) urban areas. Thus, they state that urban training had "proved the inadvisability of trying to send urban-oriented teachers to the hinterlands" (1962: 69). A close relationship between teachers and villagers was also important, as community involvement was a crucial aspect of the 1960s educational planning. Yet, from 1964 onwards, these "normal mobile camps" were converted into permanent training centres, located in Kathmandu, Palpa, Pokhara, Dharan, and Birganj (see Joshi 2003: 91ff).

Private Education: Political Battlefields

Private education has played an increasingly important role in the Nepalese educational "landscape". While education was the sole responsibility of the government until 1980, the Education Act 1980 allowed for the operation of private schools. While their number increased modestly during the 1980s, increases were quite significant during the early and mid 1990s. Thus, by now there are about 8,500 private schools, providing educational facilities to about 1.5 million students. Yet, these institutions are highly concentrated, particularly in the Kathmandu valley and in some urban centres of the Terai,

as for instance in Morang and Jhapa (eastern region) and Kanchanpur and Chitwan (western and central region). Private schools are usually associated with two characteristics. Firstly, they have contributed decisively to increasing the quality of education. Thus, their students account for about 80% of the best students in the SLC-examinations (first division), although only 12% of the class 10 students attend private schools (about 24,170 out of 196,953 for 2001; HMG/MOES 2003: 77ff).

Secondly, private schools have been increasingly criticised for charging high, or even "exorbitant" fees (Pokharel 2003: 19). Yet, fees, in a free market economy, are good indicators for several aspects. On the one hand, they are a good indicator of what economists would call "purchasing capacities", documenting economic capacities of an increasing number of households to "channel" expenditures into education. Closely related, expenditures and investments into education are also crucial indicators for social change, documenting a psychological state of affairs, when households chose to spend their earnings in education rather than in other "consumption" sectors. This often implies an underlying assumption that the higher the fees the better the education. Thus, many parents seem to be "willing" to safeguard their children's future by investing up to the maximum of their capacities. This willingness was also encountered in a research study about the labour force engaged in carpet production in the late 1990s. There, many of the labourers with school aged children spent a comparatively high share of their incomes for private education. This type of investment was found to be a most valid proxy variable for the economic well being of the workers, as parents enrolled and un-enrolled their children in private schools according to their current economic capabilities (Graner, forthcoming).

On the other hand, private schools have been critically attacked for turning education into a lucrative business, particularly by the Maoists. Thus, their early 40-point demands handed over to the prime minister in 1996 included that "free and scientific health services and education should be available to all. The commercialisation of education should be stopped" (point 35; quoted from Thapa 2003: 394). Consistent with these ideas, private schools have been targeted, physically attacked, and even closed in many rural areas, and occasionally also in the Kathmandu valley. In order to pressurise schools the Maoist-affiliated "student organisation" (All Nepal National Free Student Union - Revolutionary, ANNFSU-R) imposed a number of strikes upon all types of educational institutions in December 2002, aiming at reducing fees in private schools (see Dhakal 2003b). This finally brought PABSON (Private and Boarding School Organisations of Nepal) to draft an 11-point code of conduct, implemented from January 2003 onwards, which was to reduce fees between 10% (for monthly fees below 500 NRs) and 25% (for fees above 2,000 NRs; ibid.). Later on, the Giri commission suggested fees between 684 to 1365 NRs, and more recently a

task force suggested 700 NRs as an upper ceiling (Amgai 2004d). In addition, schools may charge extra fees for additional services, as for instance transportation, lunch, computer and swimming facilities, as well as for examinations. Yet, rates may exceed this upper ceiling up to 50% (ibid.).

Thus, it is crucial to point out that education, both in private and government schools, has suffered a severe set-back due to the political instability arising from the Maoist insurgency, which has targeted teachers in particular. Demanding financial "contributions" and redistributing those within the villages may have brought about some applause from the local peasantry during their early "Robin Hood" phase. Yet, they have gone much further later on, by attacking and even killing teachers, particularly since late 2001 (see also SPOTLIGHT 2002b). Some of the most disgusting examples were the cases of Mukti Nath Adhikari from Lamjung in 2002 who was stabbed and hanged in front of his students, and Gyanendra Khadka who was hacked to death in Sindhupalckok in August 2003 (see Dhakal 2004a). These actions are detrimental to education, and the psychological damage for the (young) students is certainly profound. Similarly, the taking of hostages has made school attendance a dangerous pastime.

Many teachers who feel threatened are thus leaving their schools, sometimes after taking official permission from the respective District Education Office. Such actions have left many schools without teachers, and has drastically worsened the already sorry state of teachers' attendance at government schools. Besides, it is depriving them of their fundamental rights which even the Maoists should acknowledge. Maoist training camps should definitely not be taken as a potential alternative for minors, or otherwise one would have to ignore millions of Chinese youth left educationally devastated during the years of the so-called "cultural revolution" in China. Calls from the UN and guardians' associations to convert schools into "peace zones" should be taken seriously. Otherwise a dangerous divide could evolve between those who can afford to send their children to neighbouring India and even further abroad and those "left behind" (see below). If overcoming this "educational divide" is really a part of the Maoists' agenda, then high-quality education has to be facilitated within Nepal, instead of contributing to making it (next to) impossible.

Aiming at Quality Education: (re-)Considering the "Stakeholders"
In 1991, HMG/MOE raised concerns that the country may end up with a five-tier (basic) education system model, i.e. an expatriate model for the affluent, a private model for the less affluent, a public model for the middle class, an out-of-school model for the poor, and no model for the poorest (quoted in NESAC/UNDP 1998: 87). This article has shown that enrolment figures generally seem to confirm this statement. On the other hand, an analysis of primary enrolment figures has also shown that these figures tell a different

story. Enrolment figures are much higher than could be solely attributed to middle class children (see Figure 2, above), indicating that the poor, and possibly even the poorest sections of society also send their children to school, for at least two or three years. Thus, the crucial question for policy makers is not how to bring children from these sections to school but how to keep them there. This is not necessarily easier to answer. Low efficiency seems to be a core issue.

When assessing the educational sector and its (lack of) achievements, a number of "stakeholders" need to be addressed and (re-)considered. Certainly the most crucial one is the state. Spending substantial amounts on physical infrastructure has brought schools closer to the potential users and has, thus, minimised reasons for not attending school. On the other hand, this pre-occupation with physical targets has ignored many other factors which need to be improved. Providing qualified teachers is certainly a decisive factor, in terms of budget allocations for salaries as well as for training facilities. Unfortunately, the current budget with its freezing of government salaries (HMG/MOF 2004), drastically counteracts this "commitment". Similarly, qualifications need to be guaranteed, in order to improve the performance of teachers. Above all, qualification rather than party alliance should be a baseline for assignments. In addition, regular trainings, for the sake of training and not for the sake of collecting TA/DAs, need to be offered. In addition, a much stricter monitoring of classroom performance is certainly important (see Dixit 2002: 205).

Similarly, curricula should be comprehensible and relevant, finding suitable compromises between national homogeneity and local variation. The latter aspect also needs to (re-)consider language issues (see also NESAC/UNDP 1998), as mother tongue classes could positively influence students' attendance, at least in primary classes. Yet, this task is certainly difficult to organise in a country characterised by a mosaic of various culturally and linguistically distinct ethnic groups. One other crucial aspect is to integrate pre-school classes, which constitute an important component of private schools. This will certainly simultaneously decrease the burden of students attending overcrowded first classes and at the same time, will facilitate school-aged (girl) children who then do not need to watch their pre-school aged siblings.

Secondly, the role of the state vis-à-vis its citizens need to be reconsidered. This implies both empowering them, but also reminding them about their core responsibilities. Nepal is one of only a few states in the world which has, until today, refrained from introducing compulsory primary education. Yet, in a country where all other policies have failed abysmally, this lack of legislation needs to be reconsidered. Similarly, in a context where many analyses indicate that children are incorporated into the household economy at a primary school age, these "opportunity costs" could be easily

counteracted by the state. In such a context, the provision of free meals at lunch time could significantly contribute to "motivating" the (rural) population to send their children to school, particularly from low-income groups. Besides, positively contributing to saving household expenditures this could also contribute to "empowering" children vis-à-vis their parents. Funds could be made available through donor agencies, as for instance as a particular type of "food-for-education" scheme.

As a second crucial "stakeholder", the roles of parents and village communities need to be reconsidered. Nepal needs a "culture" of understanding and pro-actively supporting the need and the right of children to progress in education. While back in the 1950s, the National Education Planning Commission addressed the need to "reach all the people, not just a few" (quoted in Joshi 2003: 33) and that "education must be compulsory, so that indifferent parents can not deprive their children of the benefits of education" (ibid: 92; quoted in Joshi 2003: 33), this crucial understanding was, most unfortunately, lost along the way. Thus, all parents, irrespective of ethnicity/ caste and class should take up their responsibility of sending their children to school. At the same time it needs to be pointed out that parents are more willing to send their children to school than is generally being acknowledged. Enrolment rates in early primary classes (see Figure 2, above) all across the country indicate that these figures can certainly not only be attributed to "middle classes" only. Yet, when repetition rates are as high as they currently are, then the commitment from the side of the parents is likely to be lost on the way. In this respect, village communities also need to receive a much higher form of empowerment towards the teachers, increasing their accountability towards the local community rather than solely towards the national and district-level administration, as documented from India (see Subramaniam 1997).

A further crucial need from the side of the parents is that there needs to be a wide understanding and solidarity at the village level, providing moral support and, if necessary, also financial assistance to those families where so far education is given a low priority. The provision of free meals could certainly contribute positively to "convincing" parents. Similarly, there needs to be a provision of funds for tuition classes for low-performing students, as wide disparities within classes pose a burden not only for the teachers but also for all fellow students. In addition, parents need to take a much more (pro-)active role in mobilising additional internal funds. The government's commitment to free primary education does not necessarily imply that all expenses can be covered. There should be a willingness from the side of village communities to contribute to school budgets, in financial and/or labour contributions, for poorer households. Such a fund could positively contribute to making schools more attractive for both students and teachers, and the latter could upgrade their meager salaries by offering efficient tuition

classes, in addition to, and not instead of, an efficient classroom performance. This could bring about a situation where schools are perceived as the jewels of village life, increasing the willingness to let one's children participate. Closely linked to this, elder students should become model roles for younger students, engaging in educational rather than in the political agendas of student unions.

Parents also need to take up their responsibility vis-à-vis the teachers. Even if only a few of them are qualified to monitor class room performance, monitoring of teachers' attendance could positively contribute to decentralising education and empowering village communities. This also includes pressurising the government(s) to provide the institutional (and legal) framework for increasing their role, possibly also by providing them (partial) financial autonomy towards the teachers. Such a regulation could bring about a stronger feeling of teachers' accountability towards the village community, rather than solely being oriented towards the District Education Offices (see also Dixit 2002: 201). The current amendment of the Education Act has contributed towards this end.

The third crucial stakeholders in improving education are the teachers. Representing the state and its policies at the local level, they are the most crucial "interface". While being trained and paid to deliver education, their actual tasks are much more comprehensive. They need to motivate students to attend classes. In large classes, and when capabilities of strongly vary widely, this can be quite a demanding task. In such cases, tuition classes could help "poorer" students to improve their standing. This aspect is particularly important while preparing for the annual (or term) examinations, where achievements are generally rather weak. In some cases, teachers may also need to motivate parents in order to send their children to school and in some cases, even help to prevent parents from stopping their children attend.

Yet, such a commitment can only be asked for in an atmosphere where teachers enjoy their work and, above all, feel safe. This latter aspect asks for addressing the role of the political parties, the Maoists in particular. Murdering teachers in front of their students is certainly not a way to increase educational standards. It has also fairly little to do with ideology. Similarly, even though teachers' salaries may be high in comparison to village economies, extorting from teachers is bound to decrease their motivation and, in extreme cases, encourage them to leave the village, leaving behind young students who are in desperate need of education. The condemnation of the commercialisation of education may address a core issue of current society. Yet, in a setting where government education has failed to provide meaningful access to quality education, it is only natural that the private sector has taken the opportunity to fill this gap, some motivated by idealism and others rather by commercial interests. Condemning both is counter-productive, rather there need to be clear guidelines, from government and

from the Maoists in areas under their control, outlining "codes of conduct" for both government and private schools, and these need to be strictly adhered to and monitored. If such changes are brought about, then private education can gradually become obsolete, and free education will no longer imply "an excuse to provide below-standard education" (Dixit 2002: 206), where parents are asked to compromise on the quality of their children's education (ibid.).

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Appendix 1

Table A1: Framework for General as well as Gender-related Institutions, Policies and Laws

Political Framework	General Policies and Legislations	Education-related Policies/Legislations, Institutions and Projects
Rana period (1846-1950)	• Muluki Ain (1854)	•
Democratic Period (1950 – 60)	•	• National Education Plan (1954)
Panchayat-Period (1960-1990)	• (new) Muluki Ain (1963) • Basic Needs Fulfillment Programme (1987)	• All Round National Education Committee (ARNEC, 1961) • National Education Systems Plan (1971) • Education Act (1980) • UNICEF: Education of Girls and Women in Nepal (1983-1988)
Multi-party Democracy (1990 onwards)	• New Constitution (1990) • Local Governance Act (1999) • Muluki Ain (11th amendment (2002)	• Basic and Primary Education Project (BPEP) 1992 – 1998 (First Phase) • Women Education Unit (Min. of Education, 1993) • Basic and Primary Education Project (BPEP) 1999 – 2004 (Second Phase) • Education Act, 8th Amendment (2002)

Graner 2004 (compiled from various sources)

Appendix 2

Table A1: Numbers of Boy and Girl Students for (1980 –2001)

	1991	1996	2001		1991	1996	2001
[in 1,000]	Number of Boy Students				Number of Girl Students		
Total	2,352	2,747	3,004		1,306	1,821	2358
Primary (class 1-5)	1,811	2,046	2,128		1,073	1,401	1726
Class 1 only	755	833	727		484	582	606
Classes 2-5	1,056	1,213	1,401		589	819	1120
Classes 6-10	541	702	876		232	419	632

Sources: HMG/NPC/CBS 1993, 1998, 2003

FAMILY CHANGE IN NEPAL: EVIDENCE FROM WESTERN CHITWAN

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Family change has been of central interest in both academia and the policy arena for some time. Because family has always had the primary responsibility for raising children, caring for individuals as they age, and generally pursuing the welfare of their individual members, and changes in the family have important influences on individuals, the study of family change has received great attention in this research literature. Moreover, as social scientists discovered the many different forms of family change around the world, the study of the transitions became a central focus of family research (Goode 1970; Thornton 2001, 2005; Thornton and Lin 1994). These include the transition from large families with extended family living, high parental authority, low youth autonomy, young ages at marriage and childbearing, low levels of fertility control, or low women's status and independence to smaller families with nuclear family living, low parental control, high youth autonomy, older age at marriage and childbearing, high levels of fertility control including childlessness, or high women's status and independence, commonly labeled as western family behaviour.

Here we document the changes in family life in Nepal and examine the driving forces behind those changes in a society beginning with high fertility, young age at marriage and childbearing, low youth autonomy and low use of birth control. To document the family changes and the forces behind those changes, we take advantage of the Chitwan Valley Family Study (CVFS), a longitudinal panel study specifically designed to study families and family formation behaviours in a rapidly changing society.

The Chitwan Valley in central Nepal provides an ideal setting for studying the transition from a historical Nepali family system to a new family system with western family behaviours. Up until the early 1970s, Chiwan was an isolated valley surrounded by rivers and dense forest and heavily infested by malaria. It was a purely subsistence agricultural society with most social activities organized within families and patterns of family formation as they had been for centuries. Beginning in the late 1970s, Chitwan valley has undergone a dramatic social change that spurred the spread of wage labor employment, schools, markets, transportation, government services, and the mass media. In 1995 we launched the Chitwan Valley Family Study (CVFS) to document the rapid social changes occurring in Chitwan and to investigate their influence on family formation behaviours. By 2005, this project has

accumulated more than two-dozen studies of factors implicated in changing the timing of marriage, the arrangement of marriage, family size preferences, the timing of first birth and the use of contraception for spacing childbearing. Each of these dimensions of family formation has undergone tremendous change in Chitwan Valley.

We begin with a theoretical framework designed to explain the change in these family behaviours. We draw on the family mode of social organization approach to explain family change and variation in this setting (Thornton and Fricke 1987; Thornton, Fricke, Yang and Chang 1994). Next we turn to empirical evidence about family change in Nepal. Drawing on results from several different studies using data from the CVFS, we summarize the evidence of family change and the drivers of these changes in Chitwan valley.

Theoretical Framework
The family is the primary group within which most individuals spend the majority of their lifetimes and in which virtually all individuals spend the early years of their lives, making the family a ubiquitous element of social life and a common object of social research (Goode 1970; Thornton 2001; 2005). In fact, family has always had the primary responsibility for raising children, caring for individuals as they age, and generally pursuing the welfare of their individual members. Given the centrality of the family in most societies, family change has been so important that numerous theorists have focused on these phenomena to understand change and variation in the families around the world.

Theories of Family Change
Social scientists have offered a wide range of explanations for family changes in both the Western and non-Western parts of the world. For the most part, these explanations have been structural, emphasizing changes in the economic, social and political structure of society. Most important have been the dramatic restructuring of societies through industrialization, urbanization, increases in education and knowledge, and increased consumption and social mobility (Becker 1991, 1996; Coleman 1990; LePlay 1982 [1862]; Marx 1981 [1963-65]; Westermarck 1894 [1891]). Other commonly offered explanations include changes in science*and technology, with particular emphasis on more rapid transportation and communication networks, the expansion of mass media, more effective contraceptives, and medical and public health innovations that have decreased .morbidity and mortality (Caldwell 1982; Caldwell, Reddy and Caldwell 1983; Durkeim 1984 [1933]).

Although such structural explanations have predominated as explanations of family change, more recent enquiries have emphasized the role of

ideational factors as part of the explanations (Cleland and Wilson 1987; Caldwell 1982; Chesnais 1992; Mason 1997; Thornton and Lin 1994). For example, Lesthaeghe and his colleagues have argued persuasively that changes in religiosity and secularism are essential components for explanations of changing family behaviour in Europe (Lesthaeghe 1983; Lesthaeghe and Wilson 1986). Similarly, Caldwell (1982), Freedman (1979), and van de Kaa (1996) have all emphasized the importance of the spread of western ideas and beliefs for changes in family behaviour and ideals in non-western populations. Our own research, and that of others in Nepal, suggests that both structural and ideational forces have been important elements of family change (Ahearn 1994, 2004; Axinn and Yabiku 2001; Axinn and Barber 2001; Barber et al. 2002; Barber and Axinn 2005; Barber 2004; Ghimire et al. 2006; Suwal 2001; Yabiku et al. 1999).

To explain the dramatic family changes in Nepal, we build on the modes of social organization framework considering both the structural and ideational aspects and their potential influence for individuals and families (Thornton and Fricke 1987; Thornton and Lin 1994). This framework focuses on the extent to which the activities of daily social life, including authority patterns, information flow, living arrangements, production, consumption, socialization, leisure, and reproduction, are organized by the family versus other non-family social institutions and organizations. The framework builds upon previous research that focused exclusively on the family mode of *production* (Caldwell 1982; Lesthaeghe and Wilson 1986) and extends it to modes of *social organization* across a variety of domains: consumption, residence, recreation, protection, socialization, procreation and production. Historically, most of the activities of daily living were organized within the family (Ogburn and Nimkoff 1955; Thornton and Fricke 1987). As social changes created new non-family institutions to organize these activities, they increasingly took place outside the family (Coleman 1990). Although no society is expected to be completely organized inside or outside of families, the contrast between these two ideal types, along a continuum of family organization, acts as an aid to our understanding of family change.

The modes of social organization framework can be used to integrate and expand upon existing explanations of family formation behaviour. To date, the theoretical work on family formation behaviour has mainly focused on two sets of explanations. First are microeconomic explanations, which emphasize the influence of changes in the costs and benefits of marriage and childrearing. Second are ideational explanations, which emphasize the influence of changes in the spread of new ideas, particularly Western family ideals related to marriage and childbearing.

Microeconomic Theories: Microeconomic theories of family formation processes focus on the costs and benefits of family formation (Becker 1991;

Easterlin, and Crimmins 1985; Notestein 1953; Lesthaeghe and Surkyn 1988; Willis 1973). These theories assume that individuals are aware of their self-interest, the options available to them, and are able to act to maximize benefits. Sociologists have employed these economic theories to study family formation behaviours. For example, Coleman (1990) links the reorganization of family life to individuals' childbearing and childrearing behaviours via the costs and benefits of childrearing. He argues that the proliferation of non-family organizations and institutions (what Coleman calls 'corporate actors') shift the locus of daily social activities such as production (p. 580), education (p. 581), food preparation (p. 587), and care of the aged (p. 584) and strips out the important roles the family has been performing historically. The key is that when these activities start to happen outside of the family, they reduce the benefits and increase the cost of marriage and childbearing. For example, when productive activities occur near the home, family members—spouse, children, and kin—can assist with different tasks creating positive externalities for marriage and childbearing. However, when non-family institutions take over these activities, the positive externalities begin to weaken, which increases the costs and decreases the benefits of marriage and childbearing. These increased costs and decreased benefits motivate individuals to delay marriage and limit their fertility (Coleman 1990: 585).

Similarly, Caldwell's intergenerational wealth flows theory of fertility decline also suggests that the reorganization of historical family roles, such as care for the elderly outside the family, reduces the couple's motivation to have children. When expansion of non-family institutions weakens the role of family members, particularly the children, intergenerational flows of wealth reverse, and flow from parents to children. This reversal, argues Caldwell, induces fertility declines (Caldwell 1982). Likewise, earlier theories of demographic change contain many similar ideas. For example, Notestein argued that the reorganization of social activities outside the family reduces parents' motivations to have children. He wrote that fertility transitions began in settings that stripped the family of many functions in production, consumption, recreation, and education (Notestein 1953: 16). Thus, all these theories suggest an important role of social and family organization to individual-level childbearing behaviour.

Ideational Theories: Different from microeconòmic theories that emphasize the costs and benefits of marriage and childrearing, ideational theories stress the spread of new ideas and social interactions as the key to family change. Social interactions outside of the family change the pool of people with whom individuals interact, providing an opportunity to be exposed to new ideas about family formation. The ideational perspective initially emerged from the fact that the regional patterns of fertility decline in European countries were much more closely associated with social categories such as ethnicity, language and religious groupings than differences in economic conditions, suggesting that patterns of communication and prevailing ideas about fertility behaviour in those communities may have shaped childbearing behaviour (Anderson 1986). Previous studies have linked the spread of many types of new ideas to later marriage and childbearing and high prevalence of contraceptives. These new ideas include information about love and later marriage (Macfarlane 1976; Rindfuss and Morgan 1983), smaller family size preferences (Caldwell 1982; Lightbourne 1984), modern contraceptive methods (Knodel 1987), higher consumption aspirations (Easterlin 1987; Freedman 1979), and secular and individualistic attitudes and preferences in general (Lesthaeghe and Wilson, 1986; Lesthaeghe and Surkyn 1988; Bumpass 1990). Scholars have not only linked these new ideas to love marriage (rather than arranged marriage), to older ages at marriages, to later childbearing, and to contraceptive prevalence, but they have also identified multiple potential mechanisms through which these new sets of ideas spread. These mechanisms include social networks (Watkins 1991; Watkins and Danzi 1995), the spread of Western ideas through colonial education systems (Caldwell 1982), increased migration, travel, and tourism (Bongaarts and Watkins 1996; Freedman 1979) and contact with mass media (Bongaarts and Watkins 1996; Casterline 1985).

The mode of social organization framework is consistent with both microeconomic and ideational theories of family change. For example, when daily activities are organized outside of the family, it may alter the costs and benefits of marriage and childrearing, stimulating individuals to change their behaviour, as asserted by most microeconomic theories (Bulatao and Lee 1983; Easterlin and Crimmins 1985). On the other hand, reorganized activities also alter the group of people with whom individuals interact, facilitating the diffusion of alternative ideas consistent with family and fertility theories emphasizing the diffusion of new ideas (Montgomery and Casterline 1993; Cleland and Wilson 1987). Thus the mode of social organization framework incorporates both microeconomic change and the diffusion of ideas as mechanisms of fertility change. This characteristic of the framework is particularly useful, as both sets of changes are likely to exert important influences on marriage and childbearing behaviour (Lesthaeghe and Surkyn 1988).

However, the family mode of social organization framework does not make a single set of universal predications. Instead, use of this framework requires us to define the starting state of the family organization and family behaviour in order to evaluate the likely consequences of specific changes in family organization. Therefore, we describe the setting for our research on family change before describing our specific hypotheses.

The Study Setting
The study area for this programme of research is the western part of the Chitwan Valley in the south central part of Nepal. As shown in Figure 1, it is surrounded by the Royal Chitwan National Park (reserved jungle) and the Rapti River in the south, Nepal's East-West Highway and Barandabar Forest in the east, and by the Narayani River in the west and north. The total land area of western Chitwan is 91 square miles. Until the 1950s, Chitwan was covered with dense tropical forest with diverse flora and fauna including the one horned rhino, the Bengal tiger and many species of highly poisonous snakes, birds, trees, shrubs and grasses. Because of the high prevalence of malaria, Chitwan was until the 1960s known as the Death Valley. There were only a few tribal communities, such as the Chepangs in the hills and the Tharus, Majhis and Botes along the riverside, who earned their livelihood through hunting, fishing and gathering forest products in Chitwan.

Figure 1: Map of Study Area : The Chitwan Valley

In 1955, the Nepalese government opened this valley for settlement by distributing land parcels to people from adjoining districts of the country. The flat terrain with its highly fertile soil and warm climate offered promising opportunities for people who were struggling with the steep mountain slopes

to support their survival. In 1956, the government, in collaboration with the United States government (International Cooperation Assistance [ICA]), implemented a malaria eradication programme and people slowly settled. Chitwan soon became a "melting pot," with people from all over the country. This geographically central, new settlement area became home to many different Himalayan ethnic groups. As shown in Figure 2, the population of the whole Chitwan district grew very rapidly.

Figure 2. Population in Chitwan Over Time 1920-2001
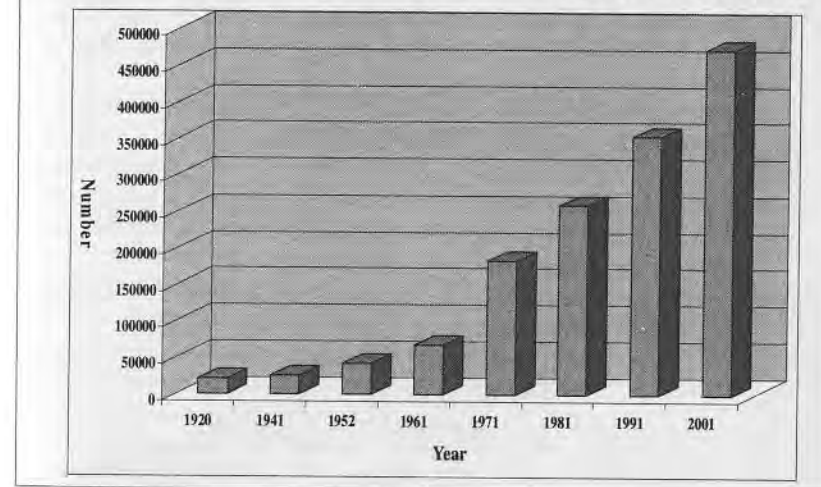
Up until the 1970s, the valley remained largely isolated from the rest of the country. The first all-weather road into Chitwan was completed in 1979. This road linked Chitwan's largest town, Narayanghat, to cities in Eastern Nepal and India. Two other important roads followed: one in the west, linking that town to the western portion of Nepal, and another in the north, linking Chitwan to Kathmandu. Because of Narayanghat's central location, by the mid-1980s this once isolated town became the transportation hub of the country. This change produced a rapid proliferation of government services, businesses and wage labour jobs in Narayanghat, and a massive expansion of schools, health services, markets, bus services, cooperatives and employment centers throughout Chitwan (Pokharel and Shivakoti 1986; Axinn and Yabiku 2001).

Figure 3 shows the average walking distance, in minutes, to the nearest public services over time. This average distance is calculated from 171 neighbourhoods systematically selected to represent western Chitwan valley (for details about sampling procedure please see Barber et. al. 1997). The

numbers in the Y-axis in Figure 3 are average minutes to the nearest service and the numbers in the X-axis are the years, beginning from 1953 to 1995. As shown in Figure, there has been dramatic decrease in the average walking distance to the nearest public services over last 50 years. For example, in 1960, residents of western Chitwan on an average had to walk about an hour to reach to their nearest school, whereas in 1990 they could reach to the nearest school after only a 10 minute walk. Similar but more gradual trends are common for other public services such as health services, bus services, markets and employers. This transformation, from an isolated valley to a busy business center and fast-growing valley, has had tremendous impact on the daily social life of communities and individuals.

Figure 3: Change Over Time in Mean Minutes by Foot to the Nearest Public Services
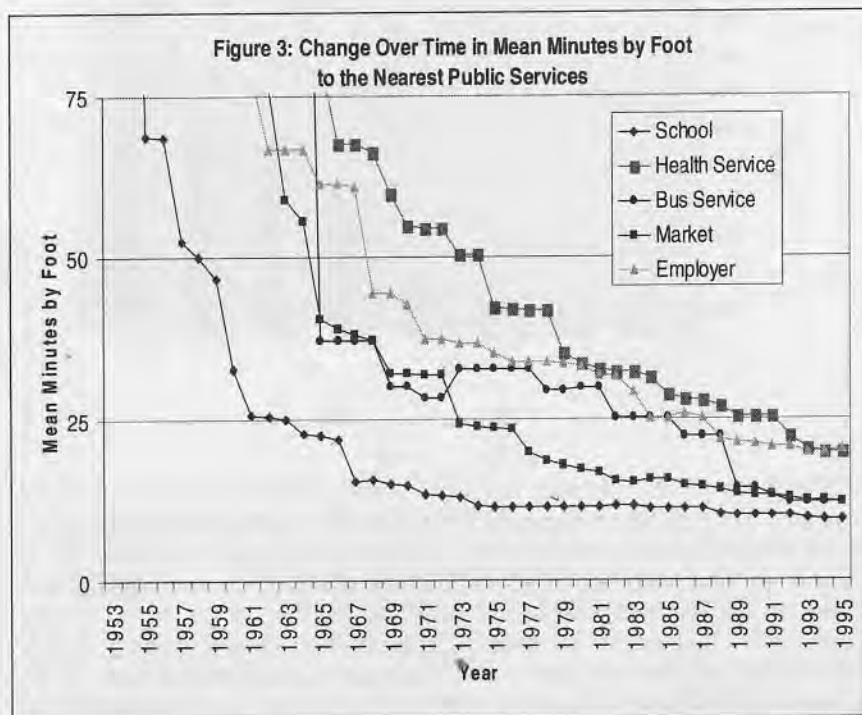
The massive expansion of services such as schools, health services, bus services, market, employment centers and communication facilities resulted in more young people going to school, working outside the family and interacting with mass media. As a result there has been a sharp increase in school enrolment, visits to health clinics, employment outside of the home, and exposure to different sources of mass media in recent birth cohorts (Axinn and Barber 2001; Axinn and Yabiku 2001; Barber and Axinn 2004; Ghimire et al., 2006; Yabiku 2004, 2005).

Hypothesis

As we discussed above, the above setting represents high levels of family organization, with most social activities organized within the family and family system, characterized by arranged marriage, early marriage and a low level of contraceptive use, high marital fertility and extended families. In this setting, increased access to non-family organizations and institutions, such as markets, schools, health care, mass media, and transportation is expected to result in the reorganization of production, consumption, residence, recreation and socialization outside the family. This reorganization of the social activities of daily life alters the costs and benefits of marriage and childrearing, and is predicted to increase age at first marriage, lead to later first birth, promote contraceptive use and lower total fertility.

Data and Methods

The CVFS selected an equal probability, systematic sample of 171 neighbourhoods in Western Chitwan (Barber et al. 1997). Once a neighbourhood was selected, a history of each neighbourhood was collected using a calendar method (Axinn, Barber and Ghimire 1997). At least six group interviews of people residing in the neighbourhood and nearby were conducted to generate information on changes in neighbourhood services and facilities from 1953 to 1995. Furthermore, the information collected on neighbourhood services from these interviews was verified with archival records from local institutions such as schools, health services, and district level government offices.

Following the neighbourhood histories data collection, a household survey was carried out to collect information pertaining to household resources. In addition, a separate survey was conducted to collect information on relationships among households within each neighbourhood. A total of 1,805 households residing within the 171 neighbourhoods were interviewed with a 100% response rate.[1]

After the household surveys were conducted, all individuals aged 15 to 59 residing in the sampled households were personally interviewed using a standardized questionnaire and a Life History Calendar (LHC). Also surveyed were respondents' spouses who lived elsewhere or who were outside the age range. A total of 5,271 individuals were interviewed, with a 97% response rate. In the standardized interviews, individuals were asked a variety of questions regarding their family background, personal characteristics, experiences, childhood community context and attitudes about various aspects of social life. In addition, the LHC portion of the survey collected information on residence, marital status, children, contraceptive use, living arrangements, schooling and work experience. Although the LHC uses a more flexible approach to gathering data than structured interview questions, it does collect standardized calendar time

information for various defined domains in predetermined time periods. The LHC provides special advantages for accurate retrospective measurement and sequencing of personal life events (Axinn, Pearce and Ghimire 1999; Belli 1998; Freedman, Thornton, Camburn, Alwin and Young-DeMarco 1988), and the structured interview allows these reported events to be linked to personal and contextual characteristics.

Finally, the CVFS launched a prospective monthly demographic and contraceptive use survey. After the individual interviews were completed in 1997, the CVFS started collecting information each month from the respondent households on demographic events, including migration, living arrangements, marriage, birth, death and contraceptive use. If any original households or respondents moved out of the sample neighbourhood, they were followed, and new individuals and households that moved into the sample neighbourhood were added to the monthly registry system. Thus the CVFS gathered a unique combination of measures designed to provide comprehensive understanding of the dramatic family changes happening in Chitwan.

Results

Our results come from several previous studies conducted using CVFS data during the last ten years. Some of these studies focus on timing of first marriage, some on the arrangement of marriage, some on timing of first birth and some on the timing of contraceptive use to limit fertility. We organize the discussion of these results in the order of our predictions above.

Marital Arrangements

We begin our summary of results by presenting findings from Ghimire, Axinn, Yabiku and Thornton's 2006 study of premarital non-family experiences and spouse choice. In this study the authors both documented the changes in the participation in the selection of a spouse over time and investigated individual level determinants of participation in choice of first spouse. Thus, the dependent variable in their analyses is the degree of participation in choice of first spouse.

Out of the 2,832 ever married respondents interviewed in the CVFS, 65 per cent reported that their first marriages were solely arranged by parents/relatives and the rest of the 35% reported they had either participated to some degree or solely chose their spouse. This suggests that a vast majority of Nepalese still have their spouses solely chosen by their parents and relatives.

In Figure 4 we show change over time in the proportion of married individuals who participated in the selection of their spouse by the year of marriage. Year of marriage, in 10 year marriage cohorts, is along the x-axis and proportion who participated in spouse selection is along the y-axis. The

clear upward trend shows that the proportion participating in the selection of their spouse has increased steadily and dramatically over the past 60 years. None of the people married between 1936-1945 participated in the selection of their spouse, but over half of those married between 1986-1995 did so.

Figure 4: Proportion of Married Persons Spouse Selection Over

information for various defined domains in predetermined time periods. The
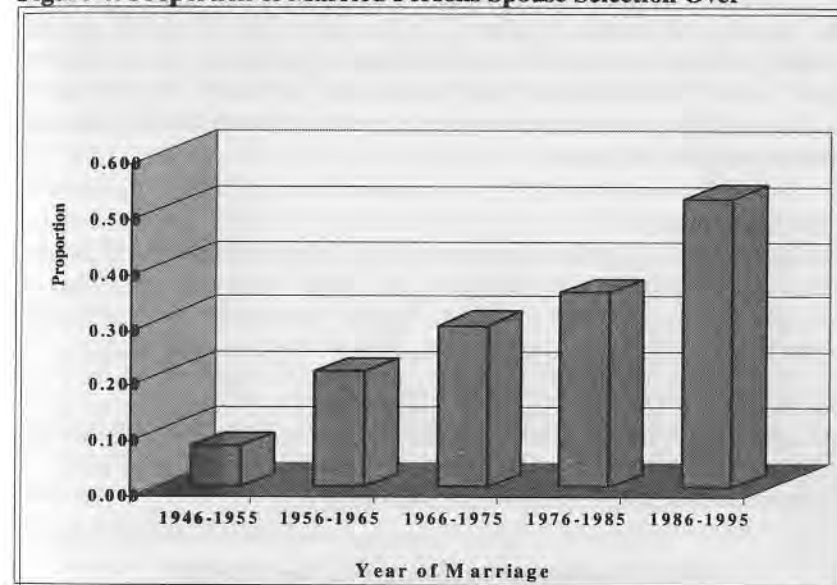
To investigate the individual level determinants of participation in spouse choice, instead of using a dichotomy of arranged marriage vs individual choice, Ghimire et al. (2006) treat the choice of a spouse as continuum and focus on the level of respondent participation in the choice of her or his spouse. In order to estimate multivariate models of this ordinal measure of participation in spouse choice, Ghimire et. al. (2006) use an ordered logistic regression estimation technique. For more details about this estimation technique, the measures used in these models, or other aspects of the model specification, please see Ghimire, et al (2006). Our aim here is only to provide a brief summary of the substantive results from these complex multivariate models.

Among the six non-family experiences (school enrolment, educational attainment, non-family work, non-family living, media exposure and participation in youth club) that Ghimire et. al. (2006) investigated, exposure to media and participation in youth clubs both have independent significant effects on the degree of participation in spouse choice. The odds of participation in a higher category of spouse choice for those who scored at the top of the CVFS media exposure index are 54% greater than for those

who scored at the bottom of this index that ranges from 0-3. Likewise, those who participated in youth clubs are 46% more likely to have more participation in spouse choice than those who did not.

The results point toward particularly strong effects of media exposure and participation in youth groups before marriage on participation in the selection of a spouse. The analyses conducted by Ghimire et al. (2006) go on to demonstrate that increased exposure to mass media can account for the vast majority of the cohort change in young people's participation in the choice of their spouse. Participation in youth clubs is also important, but exposure to the mass media is by far the strongest explanatory factor in this watershed change in marital behaviour.

Marriage Timing
Studies of marriage timing using the CVFS data echoed results of marital arrangement. Similar to participation in spouse selection, mean age at marriage has also increased over time. Figure 5 displays the mean age at first marriage for different marriage cohorts. Year of marriage is along the x-axis and mean age at marriage is along the y-axis. As this figure shows, the mean age at marriage has risen dramatically across marriage cohorts in our study. The mean age at marriage for those married between 1956 and 1965 was just over age 15, but for those married between 1996 and 2002 it was nearly 21 years. This trend is also evident in national surveys.

Figure 5. Mean Age at First Marriage Over Time 1956-2002
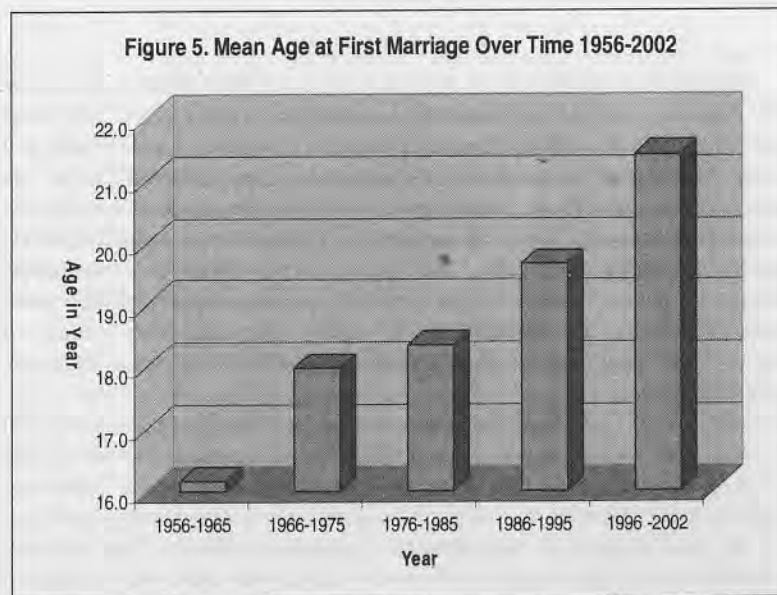
Using CVFS neighbourhood history calendar, individual interview, and life history calendar data, Yabiku conducted a comprehensive investigation of the factors associated with the timing of marriage as the rate of marriage— factors that increase the rate of marriage speed up marriage, while factors that reduces the rate delay marriage.[2] His findings are published in a pair of articles on marriage timing (Yabiku 2004 and 2005). In Yabiku's analyses of marriage timing, he found that a broad array of community characteristics, neighbours' and individual's experiences and attitudes have strong effects on the rate of first marriage. Having schools, health services, cinema halls, or bus stops within a 5 minutes walk from the respondent neighbourhood decreases the marriage rate, whereas having an employer or police station nearby increases the rate of marriage. Having neighbours with high education, media exposure, and attitudes favoring late marriage and singlehood all decreases the marriage rate. At the individual level, school enrolment, visits to a health service, and premarital exposure to media each has a strong negative effect on the rate of marriage. For example, among the married women, those who have watched television before their marriage marry at rates 36% lower than the women who have never watched television before their marriage (for details see Yabiku 2004 and 2005). On the contrary, years of schooling and employment in the previous year both increase the rate of marriage.

Age at First Birth
Similar to mean age at marriage, the mean age of women at first birth has also increased over time. Figure 6 displays the mean age of women at first birth for different marriage cohorts. Year of first birth is along the x-axis and mean age at first birth is along the y-axis. As this figure shows, the mean age at first birth has risen gradually across birth cohorts in our study. The mean age of women at first birth for those women who gave first birth between 1956 and 1965 was just over age 19, but for those who gave first birth between 1996 and 2002 it was nearly 22 years.

Figure 6. Mean Age at First Birth over Time 1956-2002
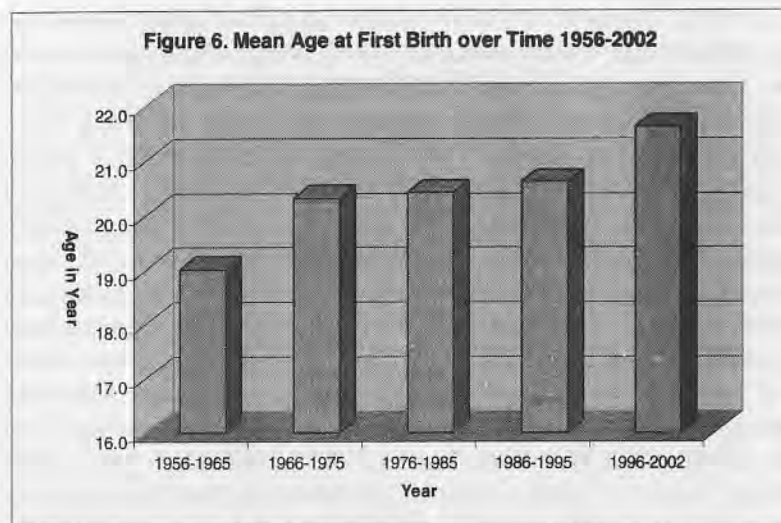
Using the CVFS measures, Ghimire and his colleagues conducted a detailed investigation of the factors associated with this dramatic rise in the age at first birth. Like Yabiku, Ghimire and colleagues treat the timing of first birth as the rate of first births, investigating factors that increases rates at first birth (speed up birth timing) versus factors that reduce the rate of first birth (delay first birth timing). His results can be found in a series of papers on first birth timing (Ghimire 2004; Ghimire 2006; Ghimire and Axinn 2006; and Ghimire and Hoelter 2006). Ghimire and Axinn (2006) found that having schools, health services and agriculture cooperatives nearby each substantially decreases the rate of first birth. Similarly, Ghimire (2004) found that neighbours' media exposure tends to reduce the first birth rate, while neighbours' marital and childbearing experiences and non-family work increase this rate. Although part of neighbours' influence work through neighbourhood characteristics, both neighbours' experiences and neighbourhood characteristics influence the rate of first birth independent of each other. Similarly, Ghimire and Hoelter (2006) found important impact of local land use on first birth timing. The results show that women from communities with a larger proportion of agricultural land experience first birth at rates higher than those women living in communities with a smaller proportion of agricultural land. On the contrary, women living in communities with a larger proportion of land area under public infrastructures gave first birth at rates lower than those women who lived in neighbourhoods with a smaller proportion land area devoted to public infrastructure.

At the individual level, Ghimire (2006) found that the individual experiences of wives and husbands both have independent effects on first birth timing. For wives, higher age at marriage, non-family work experience, educational attainment, and media exposure all tend to increase the first birth rate, while participation in husband selection, school enrolment, and contraceptive use tend to reduce this rate. For husbands, participation in selection of a wife, educational attainment, and media exposure increase the rate of first birth, while school enrolment reduces it.

Together, findings of these studies provide empirical evidence for dramatic family change from parentally arranged marriages at young ages and young motherhood to increasing participation in spouse selection, and older age at marriage and childbearing. These changes in Nepalese family patterns are greatly influenced by ways in which individuals' social activities are organized within the family versus outside the family. For example, those who enrolled in school are more likely to delay marriage and childbearing. Similarly, participation in youth clubs and exposure to mass media each strongly encourages participation in spouse choice. What this means to Nepali society is, as more and more Nepalese continue to engage in non-family activities, and spend more time outside of their family, they will be more likely to adopt these new family patterns that were not historically common in Nepal.

Contraceptive Use

Finally, we summarize the findings from another set of studies (Axinn and Barber 2001; Axinn and Yabiku 2001; Barber and Axinn 2004; Brauner, Axinn and Ghimire 2004), which are a part of CVFS studies on contraceptive use to limit childbearing. Contraceptive use behaviour has also changed dramatically in Chitwan. In Figure 7 we show the proportion of women at each age, with at least one child, who has ever used a contraceptive method to stop having children, by cohort. Age is along the x-axis and the proportion of women is along the y-axis. Among the cohort born in 1942-51 (ages 45-54 in 1996), less than 5% had used contraception to terminate their childbearing by age 25. Yet among the cohort born in 1962-71 (ages 25-34), more than 35% had used contraception to terminate their childbearing by age 25. Of course, many in the 1942-51 birth cohort eventually went on to use birth control (49% by age 45), but the large differences across cohorts demonstrates a tremendous change in the pace of adopting contraception.

Figure 7: Proportion of Women Using Contraceptives by Age
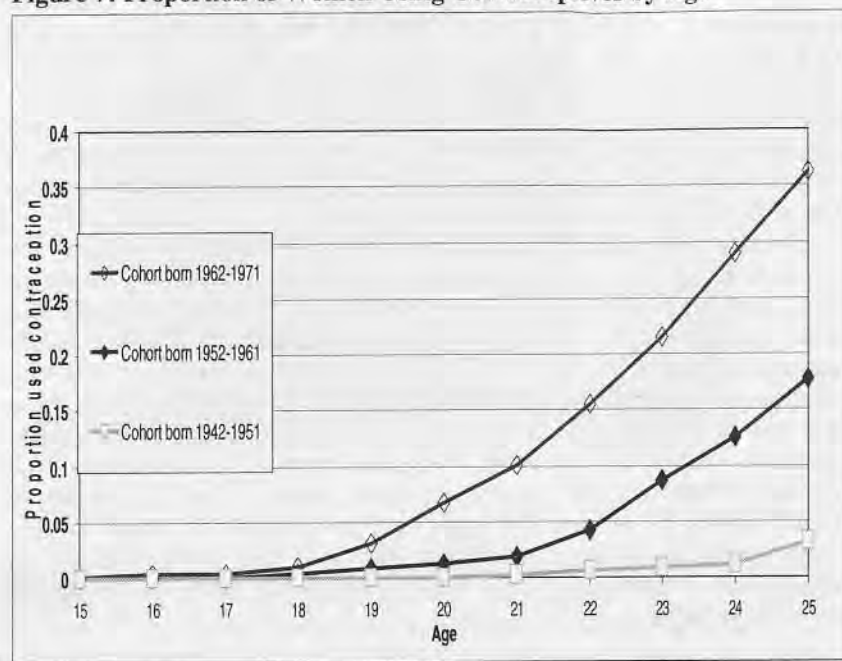
Axinn and Barber (2001) examine the consequences of access to schools, women's own schooling, husband's schooling and children's schooling on the rate of contraceptive use in Chitwan. They find that living within a one-hour walk of a school during childhood substantially and significantly raises the odds of limiting childbearing in adulthood. Women who lived nearby a school during their childhood have 41% higher odds of adopting a permanent contraceptive method during any one-year period, given that they have not already done so. More importantly, this effect is independent of the effects of community characteristics. Living near a school during *childhood* increases the likelihood of fertility limitation regardless of whether the woman lives near a school as an *adult*. This effect is consistent with other research indicating that exposure to social change during childhood alters family related attitudes, but exposure to social change during adulthood does not (Barber 2004). Furthermore, Axinn and Barber (2001) also find a strong positive influence of women's, their husband's and their children's schooling on the rate of contraceptive use for stopping childbearing. Overall, Axinn and Barber find the spread of mass education has a strong influence on the transition from unlimited childbearing to the widespread use of birth control to limit childbearing.

Axinn and Yabiku (2001) conducted a parallel study using these same data, but investigated a broader range of non-family organizations and services. They found that childhood community context has long term effects on fertility limitation that are not explained by adult experiences or adult community context. Exposure to non-family organizations and services in childhood significantly increases the odds of using contraceptives to terminate childbearing many years later, in adulthood (Axinn and Yabiku 2001). They also found that close access to non-family organizations and services at the time when contraception decisions are being made significantly increases the rate of contraceptive use to limit childbearing. They find that individuals' own non-family experiences explain part of, but not all, of this effect of the local community context. Overall, the Axinn and Yabiku (2001) results point toward the reorganization of the social activities, from the family to non-family organizations, as the key link between community level contextual change and individual level adoption of birth control to limit family size.

Barber and Axinn (2004) offer a detailed investigation of the role of mass media on fertility preference and behaviour. Their investigation makes several interesting findings. They find that a wife's exposure to radio, movie, television and newspaper are each strongly related to positive attitudes toward contraceptive use, preferences for smaller family size, weaker son preferences and higher rates of permanent contraceptive use. More interestingly, among the four media sources they investigated, exposure to movie and radio have strong independent effect on permanent contraceptive use.

In a more recent study of the impact of the spread of health services on contraceptive use, Brauner and her colleagues similarly find the important effect of access to health service providers on permanent contraceptive use. The findings also indicate that besides simple access to contraceptive methods, other health services offered by these health service providers also influence the rate of contraceptive use in this setting. Brauner and her colleagues found that both the provision of contraceptive methods and maternal and child health services have independent effects on the rate of contraceptive use to end childbearing. For example, the provision of child vaccination services increases the rate of contraceptive use to limit fertility independently of family planning services.

Discussion

Using the unique and comprehensive measures created for the Chitwan Valley Family Study (CVFS), a team of researchers have documented dramatic changes in family formation behaviours that are taking place in Chitwan. The findings of these studies show that more and more Nepali youth are embracing new marital and childbearing behaviours that were

almost non-existent a few decades ago. More young people are taking part in the selection of their own spouse, marrying at older ages, starting childbearing later and limiting their fertility. These are monumental changes within the lifetimes of the current residents of Chitwan valley, making the family experiences of young people much different to those of their parents.

In addition, the results of these studies reveal many of the key forces operating to produces these changes. The evidence we summarize here focuses on effects of childhood and contemporary community contexts, as well as both the experiences and attitudes of neighbours and individuals. These findings suggest an important interplay between the structural and ideational forces producing these changes. The empirical evidence points toward the spread of mass media, participation in youth groups, education in schools and the spread of non-family organizations and services including schools, employment centers, markets and health services as key factors increasing participation in spouse choice, age at marriage, age at first birth and contraceptive use to limit childbearing.

Perhaps more importantly, these analyses indicate that the dramatic changes in the families and family behaviours in this agrarian society have been influenced by factors at both the individual level and the contextual level. Rarely has any research on family change been able to provide such a comprehensive investigation of the influence of both the individual and contextual factors from a single setting. Research in Chitwan suggests that even in a society where family and kinship institutions are very strong, young people are aware of and greatly influenced by the new experiences outside of family, and the behaviour of people and institutions around them.

In terms of theoretical implications, the evidence provided here is consistent with the modes of social organization framework which suggests that both the structural and ideational aspects of individuals' life circumstances are important parts of their decision-making processes. The important effects of childhood community context found in these studies is consistent with theories of childhood socialization that suggest that individuals construct their family building plans early in life and stick with those plans (Coleman, 1990; Easterlin, 1987; Elder, 1974, 1977, 1983; Mead, [1934] 1967). On the other hand, the strong effects of the characteristics of the contemporary community context we find in these analyses support the microeconomic views, which emphasize the cost-benefit tradeoffs perceived at the *time* of family building decisions (Becker 1991; Coleman 1990; Easterlin and Crimmins 1985; McNicoll 1980, 1984; Notestein 1953). As with many dimensions of social life, it appears that both early life socialization and later life opportunities and constraints are involved in reshaping family processes in Chitwan (Axinn and Yabiku 2001).

In addition to their theoretical implications, these findings have important implications for policies aimed at reducing population growth in societies

undergoing rapid social, economic and institutional change in a context of persistently high fertility in general and Nepal in particular. The findings of these studies go beyond the previous research findings in terms of understanding the mechanisms through which social, economic and institutional changes influence individual behaviour and providing new directions for public policy.

First, numerous studies in the past have shown a strong association between the spread of mass education and fertility decline around the world. As a result, policy makers from the poorer parts of the world have often taken mass education as a panacea for social problem, including reducing the population growth. However, empirical evidence from more detailed studies including the results of our own studies, indicate that the human capital young individuals accumulate from educational attainment actually speeds up marriage (Thornton, Axinn and Teachman 1995; Yabiku 2004 and 2005) and the beginning of childbearing (Ghimire 2003, 2006), once they are out of school. Only school enrolment reduces the rate of both marriage and first birth (Yabiku 2004 and 2005, Ghimire 2003 and 2006). On the other hand, some dimensions of mass education, particularly exposure to school in childhood, men's education, and sending children to school, have strong consequences increasing the use of contraception to limit fertility. Population policies aimed at reducing fertility by postponing marriage and first birth are likely to be more effective if they focus on keeping young people enrolled *in* schools. Population policies aimed at increasing the use of contraception to limit competed family sizes are likely to be most effective when emphasizing the enrolment of young children in primary education, particularly first born children.

Second, Ghimire's findings of shorter first birth intervals among the individuals who have choice marriage and married at older ages, with a very low level of contraceptive use before first birth, casts doubts about the intended impact of late marriage on age at first birth and total fertility. Indeed, empirical evidences from other settings including Korea, Malaysia, Taiwan and China (Rindfuss and Morgan 1983; Wu 1996; Wu and Martinson 1993) suggest that the increase in participation in spouse selection and age at marriage may actually increase coital frequency, leading to a shorter first birth interval. Thus, these findings suggests that to achieve the intended goal of lowering the total fertility, programs that are designed to encourage independence in selection of spouse and later marriage will have to be combined with family planning programs to increase contraceptive use. Third, mass media has been identified as another important force behind the steady decline in total fertility around the world. The results presented above show the strong influence of mass media on family and fertility behaviours in two opposite directions. Exposure to mass media, particularly seeing movies (the most popular source of mass media in this setting) is found to be strongly

related to the ideas of youth independence (spouse selection), love, romance and sexuality. As a result, exposure to media in Chitwan encourages marriage and early childbearing. On the other hand, evidence from Chitwan also demonstrates that exposure to media is strongly related to positive attitudes toward contraceptive use, preferences for smaller family size, weaker son preferences and higher rates of permanent contraceptive use. Although exposure to mass media encourages preferences and behaviour related to lower fertility, it is mostly geared toward stopping childbearing. So, from the perspective of policies and programs aimed at reducing population growth, media exposure in rural Nepal may be having mixed effects, speeding up the initiation of childbearing, but also increasing contraceptive use to end childbearing. If mass media were also targeted at delaying the entrance into childbearing, including the use of temporary contraceptives to delay the first birth, the consequences for population growth would likely be even stronger.

Finally, social scientists and policymakers alike increasingly emphasize the important role of the social context in shaping both marriage and childbearing processes (Bongaarts and Watkins 1996; Hogan and Kitagawa 1985; Lloyd and South 1996). The results presented above indicate that both the individuals' social milieu (neighbours' experiences and attitudes) and the structural context (local opportunities and constraints) have important influences on the timing of marriage and childbearing in Chitwan. Thus, these findings suggest that population policies and programs aimed to encourage later family formation and lower fertility may be able to affect behaviour by changing the local social context.

This paper attempts to summarize the findings of multiple studies that were launched over a decade. By necessity, this summary is an incomplete accounting of the many important aspects of the original research we report. We strongly encourage interested readers to take full advantage of the original studies we summarize by reading the papers we cite. The summary of findings we present here serves to pull together a wide range of findings into a single picture of family and fertility change in rural Nepal. The findings we report help to fill a gap in existing knowledge about the factors affecting family and fertility change in rural Nepal—a gap identified in the Population Policy and Programs of Nepal's Tenth Five Year Plan (2002-2007) as an extremely high public policy concern. Furthermore, several of the findings we report here provide empirical evidence to help guide Nepal's population policies and programs. In the face of only moderate declines in marital fertility, these findings should help to provide important insights into the factors associated with continuing moderately high levels of fertility and those factors mostly likely to lead to additional reductions in fertility.

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Notes

1. To learn more about the details of the data collection, please visit http:perl.psc.isr.umich.edu
2. All analyses of timing of events (marriage, birth and contraceptive use) feature hazard models drawing on measures from the Life History Calendar described above. Because our study design features individuals who are clustered together in neighbourhoods, all of these hazard models are estimated using techniques designed to correct standard errors for within–neighbourhood clustering. For readers interested in learning more about the specific techniques used to estimate these models, or details of the models themselves, we urge them to consult the original papers, or the paper describing the estimation techniques we use (Barber, Murphy, Axinn and Maples 2000). Our focus in this paper is on summarizing the substantive results of these other studies, so we will not address issues of modeling and estimation in any detail.

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THE SVANTI FESTIVAL: VICTORY OVER DEATH AND THE RENEWAL OF THE RITUAL CYCLE IN NEPAL

Bal Gopal Shrestha

Introduction

Religious and ritual life in Newar society is highly guided by calendrical festivals. We can say that the Newars spend a good part of their time to organise and perform these festivals. They are highly organised when it comes to organising ritual activities. Not only in Kathmandu but also wherever the Newars have moved and settled, they managed to observe their regular feasts and festivals, rituals and traditions. Almost every month, they observe one or another festival, feast, fast or procession of gods and goddesses. As we know, almost each lunar month in Nepal contains one or another festival (*nakhaḥcakhaḥ*). All year round, numerous festivals are celebrated, processions of deities are carried out and worship is performed.[1] Although all major and minor feasts and festivals are celebrated in every place in many ways similar the celebration of these feasts and festival in each place may vary. Moreover, there are many feasts and processions of gods and goddesses in each place, which can be called original to that place. One of the most common features of all Newar cities, towns and villages is that each of them has its specific annual festival and procession (*jātrā*) of the most important deity of that particular place. The processions of different mother goddesses during Pahāṃcarhe in March or April and Indrajātrā in August or September, and the processions of Rāto Macchendranāth in Patan and Bisket Jātrā in Bhaktapur are such annual festivals.

Besides observing fasts, feasts, festivals, organising processions of gods and goddesses, and making pilgrimages to religiously important places, another important feature of Newar society are the masked dances of various deities. In the Kathmandu Valley several masked dances are performed at different times of the year. Among them are the Devī dances, performed around the Yaṃyā festival in Kathmandu. As we know most Newar socio-religious and ritual activities are taken care of by *guthi*. All these feasts and fasts, festivals and processions of gods and goddesses, rituals and traditions of the Kathmandu Valley are characteristic for Newar culture.

Scholars agree on the fact that most feasts, fasts, festivals and procession of gods and goddesses celebrated in present day Nepal date since the Malla period some of them even date from the Thakuri period and the Licchavī period. Analysing some names of festivals found in the Gopālarājavaṃśāvalī, the oldest chronicle of Nepal, and an inscription dated 1441 AD (NS 561),

Sharma stresses that Newar festivals developed their present shape already during the reigns of Jayasthiti Malla (1382-95 AD) and Yaksa Malla (1428-1482 AD).[2] Even after the 1769 Gorkhā conquest of Nepal, the Gorkhā rulers accepted most of Newar culture as their court culture (Hoek 1990). This helped a great deal in continuation of Newar culture and its rituals in modern Nepal.

Depending on the nature of the celebrations, Newar festival rituals can be classified in various categories. For example, some festivals like Svanti (Tihār), Holi, the day of worshipping divine serpents (Nāgapañcamī) and Mohanī (Dasāin) are celebrated by most Nepalese without ethnic or caste boundaries. These festivals can be considered national festivals. They are celebrated not only in Nepal, but also in India in a grand manner. Of course, celebrations of these festivals in Nepal are immensely different from the way they are celebrated in India. Inside Nepal too, each ethnic group may celebrate them in a distinct way and sometimes within one group, the way of celebration may vary from place to place and from family to family.[3] For the Newars, Mohanī and Svanti are very important annual festivals (nakhaḥ). For the Newars, Nāgapañcamī and Holī are important, but not celebrated with any feasts, while the people in the Tarāi and in India celebrate both these festivals in a grand manner.

Most other festivals can be considered as characteristic of the Newar, because during such festivals no other ethnic groups of Nepal directly participate. Even in case they celebrate them, their way of doing so is significantly different from the Newar way. For instance, Sakimilāpunhi is observed only by the Newars; every family worships the full-moon in the evening and eats fried beans, sweet potatoes and roots of the arum lily (caladium arumacia); Newar girls may observe a day long fast on this day. Other ethnic groups do not have this tradition. Similarly Yomaripunhi, Pāhāṃcarhe, Digupūjā, Gathāṃmugaḥ, Kvātipunhi, the processions of the cows (Sāyāḥ), the day of giving alms to Buddhist priests (Pañjārāṃ), Cathā or the day to worship the crescent of the moon and Gaṇeśa, the festival dedicated to the god of rain Indra (Yamyā), are celebrated by the Newars only.

Ritual Cycle
When we look at the nature of the celebrations of these festivals, we can discover an important impact of the agricultural cycle on them.[4] It can be said that the social life of the inhabitants of the Valley is still to a large extent determined by the agricultural cycle. Until today, many feasts and festivals and processions of gods and goddesses are in one way or the other related to agriculture. However, it would be wrong to conclude that only the agricultural cycle regulates the ritual calendar of the Valley, because there are

many festivals not connected to agriculture, such as the festival of Mādhavanārāyaṇa in Sankhu.

The chain of ritual celebrations in Nepal is cyclical and it is difficult to mark one celebration as the beginning and another as the end of a cycle (Hoek 2004). Most Newars in the Valley consider that the ritual year begins on the day of Gathāmugaḥ in August, the day of expelling ghosts, and ends on the day of Sithinakhaḥ in June, the day of worshipping lineage deities. When we look at the gorgeous way of celebrating the festival of Mohanī (Dasain in Nepālī, Daserā in Hindī), the September celebration of the divine victory over the demons, coinciding with the harvest of rice, we are inclined to consider this the most important festival. Those who relate rituals with agriculture consider this festival as the beginning of a ritual cycle because the main crop, rice, is harvested around this festival.

Svanti, which falls two weeks after Dasain, is another great festival of the country. It is also the time of the beginning of the lunar eras known as the Kārtikādi eras, as they change in the month of Kārtik (October/November), which includes the New Year's Day of Nepal (Saṃvat). Many, therefore, take this festival of Svanti or Tihār as the beginning of the ritual cycle. The New Year's Day of the Nepal era falls on the fourth day of this festival, which is based on the lunar calendar. Since Nepalese people celebrate almost all their festivals according to the lunar calendar, the change of the Nepal era is an important day.

In Nepal, the lunar year begins either in the spring or fall. If it begins in the spring, it is known as Caitrādi if in the fall as Kārttikādi. The first one is also known as Pūrōmāntaka month, ending on a full moon day, while the latter one is Amāntaka, ending on the new moon. The Pūrṇamāntaka month begins from Kṛṣṇapakṣa or the dark half while the Amāntaka month begins from Śuklapakṣa (the bright half of moon).

Historians believe that the tradition of celebrating New Year's Day and Mhapūjā is much older in Nepal than the Nepal Saṃvat (Shrestha 1982: 48-53). As the New Year, many people consider this occasion as the beginning of a ritual cycle in the country. Nepālvarṣa Kriyā Nakhaḥcakhaḥ Pustakaṃ, a manual of Nepalese Festivals (NKNP), takes the festival of Svanti as the beginning of the ritual cycle in Nepal.[5] Haribodhinī Ekādaśī, the eleventh day of the bright half of Kachalā Śukla (November) marks the end of the Caturmāsa, the four-month-long sleep of the Hindu god Viṣṇu. The Caturmāsa is considered to be an inauspicious time of the year, and rituals related to the lifecycle are avoided as much as possible during this time of the year. Many people in Nepal also consider the end of Caturmāsa as the beginning of the ritual cycle. However, in Bhaktapur, Bore, Thimi and in Tokhā people celebrate their important festivals during the change of the

Vikram era, based on a solar calendar (Gutschow 1996 and Vargati 1995: 184). Because of these festivals, many people believe there that the ritual cycle begins on the New Year's Day of the Vikram year.

Seasons are important factors in determining the time of particular festivals. Many festivals are named after seasons. Nepal observes six seasons, namely Vasanta (spring-Sillā-Cillā), Grisma (summer-Caulā-Bachalā), Varṣā (rain Tachalā-Dillā), Śarad (autumn Gumlā-Yamlā), Hemanta (winter Kaulā-Kachalā), and Śiśir (frosty Thimlā-Pohelā), each season occupying a two-month time span. Similarly the devotional songs at the places of devotional singing (bhajan) change according to the change of season. People consider that Vasanta marks the renewal of seasons because it is considered to be the king of the seasons. However, festivals like Gathāmugaḥ, which Newar people consider to be the beginning of ritual, fall in autumn.

It may be clear that there is no common opinion about the beginning or the end of the ritual year in Nepal. Any of the aforementioned festivals or ceremonies may be considered a beginning of the ritual cycle in the Valley, because there is no real break of the chain of the ritual cycle. However, the NKNP takes the festival of Svanti as the beginning of the ritual cycle in Nepal. Since Svanti falls during the change of the Nepal era (October/November), more conveniently it can be taken as the beginning point of the ritual cycle, because it is one of the most ancient traditions in South Asia and Nepal.

Svanti

Svanti is one of the national festivals of Nepal celebrated throughout the kingdom by the Hindu and Buddhist population. This festival is known by several names: Svanti, Pañcaka, Yamapañcaka, Tihār and Dipāvalī. Both the words 'Tihār' and 'Dipāvalī' are derived from the Hindi words 'Tyauhāra' and 'Divālī.' Svanti, Pañcaka and Yamapañcaka are words from Nepalese origin (Naghabhani 1991: 39). The Newar people call the occasion 'Svanti' and celebrate it on their own special way. It is called the festival of light, because during this festival people illuminate their houses, streets, quarters, villages, towns and cities with as many lights as possible. On the fourth day of this festival, Newar people celebrate their New Year's Day. Performing of bhailo and dyausi (dances with special songs) on the third and fourth day of this festival is a typical tradition among the Parvates. In the evening of Lakṣmīpūjā, unmarried girls singing and dancing bhailo, go to their neighbours, where they are treated with delicious foods, while the following evening males perform dyausi.

During this festival, Yama, the god of death, is invoked and so it is called 'Yamapañcaka' or 'Five days dedicated to Yama'. People assume that,

during these five days, Yama descends on this world. On the first and second day of this festival, Yama's messengers, the crow and the dog are worshipped. On the third day, the cow is worshipped. Although the cow is worshipped as Lakṣmī, the goddess of wealth, she is also respected as an animal associated with the realm of Yama. Yama's assistance is sought in order that recently deceased people may cross the river Baitaranī to reach heaven. Honouring Yama and his messenger Yamadut on the day of Mhapūjā and worshipping Yama and his bookkeeper Citragupta on the day of Kijāpūjā clearly mark the relation of this festival to death. On the day of Mhapūjā, Yama is honoured as a protective god, while on the day of Kijāpūjā he is worshipped as an elder brother and Citragupta as a younger brother (A. Vajracarya 1987: 9-10). Although Yama is invoked on each of the five days during this festival, many people disagree with the name "Yamapañcaka" because the lofty ways of celebrating Lakṣmī, the worship of the self, and the worship of brothers have weakened the worship of Yama considerably (Naghabhani 1991: 47).

The NKNP suggests to begin this festival by worshipping Gaṇeśa on the first day, Kachalagā (Kārtik) Dvādaśī, making it a six-day festival (A. Vajracarya 1987: 3). However, in practice, people begin this festival on Trayodaśī by worshipping the crow and they consider it a five-days' festival.[6] The manners of worships now popular among the Newars are:

Kvapūjā (first day): worship of crows, messengers (of Death);

Khicāpūjā (second day): worship of dogs;

Sāpūjā and Lakṣmī pūjā (third day): the worship of cows and Lakṣmī, the goddess of wealth;

Mhapūjā (fourth day): the worship of the self, start of the New Year; and

Kijāpūjā (fifth day): the worship of brothers by their sisters.

Kvapūjā (first day), worship of crows, messengers (of Death): On the first day of Yamapañcaka, people worship and feed crows. In Newar households, it is common to offer a portion of food to crows every morning before its members eat their own meal. Crows are believed to be messengers. They are supposed to carry messages of close relatives and friends from far-away places. People assume the crows are delivering these messages while cawing. Depending on the voice of that crow, people guess whether it is delivering a good or a bad message. When it caws near the house with a sweet voice, this is taken as a good message. Sometimes the cawing is also taken as an announcement of the imminent arrival of some guests. However, if the sound is harsh, then it is supposed to be an indication of something bad that is going to happen. The crow is also supposed to be the messenger of

Yama, the god of death. People believe that, when somebody dies, the departed soul (*preta*) finds its temporary shelter in a crow. At least for the first ten days of the impure period after a death, the departed soul is supposed to reside in a crow. Every morning during the first ten-day's mourning period, the chief mourner has to perform *śrāddha* by offering a rice ball (*piṇḍa*) and food stuffs to crows in the name of the deceased person.

Khicāpūjā (second day), the worship of dogs: The second day of the Svanti festival is Khicāpūjā, the day of worshipping dogs. This day is dedicated to please the dogs. Not only pet dogs, even wandering dogs are respected and worshipped with garlands and delicacies. In Nepal, keeping dogs as pet animals is very common and there are many stray dogs too. On this day, from early in the morning, people are seen worshipping dogs in the streets. The dogs are considered to be the guards at the doors of Yama's place and people believe that their worship helps the soul's passage at the time of death. Like crows, dogs are supposed to be an abode for the recently deceased. The chief mourner performs *śrāddha* to offer *piṇḍa* and foodstuffs to dogs in the name of the deceased during the first ten days after somebody's death, just like he does to crows. Even when stray dogs enter the house of a deceased person, they are not supposed to be chased away, because people believe that a dead person visits his or her house disguised as a dog. Dogs are also regarded as the vehicle of the fearful god Bhairav and of Nāsadyo (Nātyaśvara), the god of dance and drama. They are also the gatekeepers of different temples in Kathmandu Valley.

Sāpūjā, the worship of cows as Lakṣmī and Lakṣmīpūjā (third day): *Sā* or cow is considered to be a representation of Lakṣmī, the goddess of wealth. On the third day of the festival of Svanti, the cow is worshipped and fed generously. Today, only a few families in Kathmandu have a cow at home, so those who do not have one, have to visit a place where a cow can be found or they request to bring a cow to their house for a *pūjā*. People believe that the worship brings them good fortune. They attach sacred threads, which they had received from Brahmins on the day of Janaipurnimā on the tail of a cow[7] and believe that this act enables them to receive the cow's support in crossing the river Baitaraṇī, which is said to create frightful barriers to sinful men. To give a cow as a gift to Brahmins is a religious task for Hindus that enables them to reach heaven after their death. For them, the cow is the most sacred animal and her five products: milk, curd, butter, urine and dung are considered to be pure objects.

On the same day in the evening, after the worship of the cow, people worship Lakṣmī, the goddess of wealth. For this occasion, the houses are

cleaned and decorated with lights to receive her. Lakṣmī has been represented by the word 'Śrī' which means the sum of beauty and betterment. Since ancient times, the meaning and interpretation of Lakṣmī has been vast and wide. Eight (*aṣṭalakṣmī*) or sixteen (*ṣoḍśalakṣmī*) names are invoked to please her during her worship.[8] Traditional painters provide a special picture of Lakṣmī: she has four hands; one of her right hands is carrying a traditional mirror (*jvalānhāykaṃ*) and the other is in *abhay mudrā*; one of her left hands is carrying a vermilion container (*sinhammhu*) and the other is in *bara mudrā*; she is seated on her throne, adorned with glittering dresses and ornaments on her body, wearing a golden crown on her head; her right foot is touching a tortoise and the left one is in *padmāsana mudrā*; two gods of wealth (Kubera) and two benevolent ghosts (*khyāḥ*) are represented in front of her.[9]

The preparation for the worship of Lakṣmī begins early in the morning in every household by smearing every floor with cow dung mixed with red clay and water. A line of cow dung and red clay leads from the front of the house to the secret shrine of Lakṣmī. This is to let the goddess Lakṣmī find her way to the place of worship so that she may bestow wealth on them there. They also garland the doors of the houses and paint them with coloured powders (Newar: *sinhaṃ*), especially in shops. Those who own a shop away from their own house, worship Lakṣmī at their shop first, then join their family to worship Lakṣmī at home. As soon as the sun sets, every family begins to decorate each door and window of their house with *pālācā* lamps, shallow earthen bowls with cooking oil and a wick. Two to three decades ago, people began replacing the traditional *pālācā* by candles. Today, many families also decorate their houses with coloured electric bulbs.

In every house, Lakṣmī is kept in a secret place of worship called *āgaṃ*. All the family members must join the worship. The eldest male member of the family (*nāyo*) is in charge of the worship, while women are responsible for preparing *pūjā* plates and cleaning the house. Worship ingredients are generally red and yellow powders, incenses, rice, popped rice, garland of threads (*jajaṃkā*), yoghurt, flowers, seasonal fruits, sweets and other foodstuffs. A painting of Lakṣmī made by a traditional painter is used to represent the goddess in the worship room. Old and new coins, money, gold, silver and all the treasures of the house are exhibited to receive worship on this occasion. At least one new coin must be offered to Lakṣmī or added to the stores. New utensils, new grains (paddy, rice, and wheat), measuring objects (*mānā*, *kule*, *and pāthi*) and weighing objects (*dhaḥ*) are also worshipped. Offering grains from the new harvest to Lakṣmī is an essential

ritual on this occasion, because people must offer the cereals before they consume them themselves. They believe that Lakṣmī is the goddess of grain whose benediction is necessary to gain good crops. The main reason for honouring Lakṣmī is to achieve her blessing to increase one's wealth and prosperity. People worship her every day; they believe that this worship brings them great fortune.

After the worship, follows the family feasts. Dried meat (sukulā) of various animals, kept from the festival of Mohanī two weeks earlier, is consumed today. Of course, each foodstuff is first offered to the goddess before the family eats itself. For three nights, Lakṣmī's presence is assured by keeping her in the same place and worshipping her everyday with great respect. Then, on the day after Kijāpūjā or on the fourth day's morning, is the day of svāṃ kokāyegu, i.e. to bring out Lakṣmī's blessings (flowers, ṭikā, and food) from the secret place and distribute among the family members.

Gambling, which is legally forbidden during other times of the year starts from the day of Lakṣmīpūjā and lasts for three days and three nights. People believe that gambling is auspicious during Svanti, and might bring them good fortune. It is notable that gambling was freely permitted during the Rana regime and was abolished in 1951 but revived after a year. It was finally abolished in 1963 through an act but it is still in practice.

Mhapūjā (fourth day), worship of the self, start of the New Year:
Mhapūjā is one of the oldest traditions of Nepal. It is older than that of the Nepal era (Nepal Saṃvat) itself. Bhuvanlal Pradhan assumes that one of the Licchavi kings, most probably Mānadeva I (464-505 AD), began this festival (B. Pradhan 1998: 38). Paying of all the debts of the Nepalese, a generous trader called Saṃkhadhar Sākhvā began the Nepal Saṃvat on the 20th October 879 AD, during the reign of King Rāghavadeva.[10] It so happened that the Nepal Saṃvat was introduced on the day of Mhapūjā. Malla rulers in the Valley of Nepal continued this era as the official one till their rule ended in 1769. In 1769 AD, after the Gorkhā conquest of Nepal, the Shah rulers began to use Śaka Saṃvat, which was later replaced by Vikram Saṃvat by the Rana Prime minister Chandra Shumshere in 1903 AD.[11] As the Nepalese Historians states, the reason the lunar calendar was replaced with the solar calendar was because this shrewd and despotic Rana Prime Minister wanted to cut down the burden of paying salaries for a thirteenth months to government staff every two years. The use of Nepal Saṃvat never completely died out. Since the 1950s, the Newar elite began to celebrate the New Year's Day of the Nepal era as a public event.[12] Since it is called Nepāl Saṃvat, their demand is to recognise it as a national era. As the demand

came from the Newars, it began to be labelled the Nevārī Saṃvat by many non-Newar people. In 1999, Nepalese government declared Saṃkhadhar Sākhvāla, the founder of the Nepāl Saṃvat a national hero (Rāṣtriya Vibhūti) of Nepal. Nepalese people have taken this decision as a token of recognition of the Nepal Saṃvat as a national era. So far, the government has taken no steps towards recognising Nepal Saṃvat as an official calendar for any purpose. Those in favour of Nepal Saṃvat argue that since all religious ritual activities in Nepal are based on lunar calendar it should not be a problem to recognise it for the purpose.

On New Year's Day, Mhapūjā is celebrated in a great way. On this day, Newar people perform Mhapūjā to all the deities located in their neighbourhood before they perform the worship of the self (Mhapūjā) at their houses. Usually, Mhapūjā is performed in the evening on the top floor of the house. The floor is cleaned and smeared with cow dung and red clay. Then a mandala, a cosmic circle of flour, is drawn for each person. Mandalas are also drawn for those members of the family who are absent and for the guests who are present on the occasion. They also draw some mandala in the name of the three hundred thirty million deities (tetisakoṭī dyo), of Yama, of his messenger (Yamadut) and of Śiva's messenger (Śivadut); and for household items such as broom, winnow, grinding stone, pestle, mortar, measuring pot (mānā and pāthi), water container (karuvā), and earthen pitcher.[13] I observed the Mhapūjā ceremony in my own family and in a Jyāpu family in Sankhu. In both cases, steamed rice-flour figures of Yama, his messenger, Gaṇeśa, Lakṣmī, Kubera and Balirāja were displayed. In the centre of each mandala, a small oil mandala is drawn. Then, red powder, flowers, popped and husked rice are showered over the mandala. A small kind of rice pastry (lvahacāmari), walnuts, incense, chestnuts, wild lime, common citron (tahsi), citrus fruit (bhvagatyā), threads (jajaṃkā), flower garlands and long wicks (kheluitā) are placed around a mandala to be handed over to the person sitting in front of the mandala. As far as possible, all the members of the family sit in a single row in front of one's mandala, facing east. Facing south is believed to be inauspicious. In my own (Śrestha) family, the eldest male member (nāyo) of the house sits at the head of the row; then, his juniors, unmarried daughters and other women are seated according to seniority. In the Jyāpu family, I observed that the eldest women representing the dead head of the family sat at the head of the row as the head of the family, then her juniors according to seniority. To consider eldest women as the head of the family even when there are adult sons is a significant difference between Śrestha and Jyāpu families.

The *nāyo* worships a small lamp containing a figure of Ganeśa (*sukundā*) before he begins other ritual activities.[14] All other members of the family also throw a few grains of rice to Ganeśa in a gesture of worship. Then the eldest woman (*nakiṃ*) of the house puts a *ṭikā* on everybody's forehead; other elder women assist her in handing over the *kheluitā*, *jajaṃkā* and fruits. The person who is thus blessed throws a few grains of rice over these things in a gesture of worship. Everybody must light his or her *kheluitā* and place it on his own *mandala*. This act can be seen as the actual moment of worshipping the self. The eldest woman pours worship items (*luigu*) on the mandala of each person, and then she also pours them three times over the body of each person. This is to wish the person worshipped's good, health, happiness and prosperity. Then fruit, threads and garlands are handed over. Towards the end of the ceremony, the persons worshipped are given *sagaṃ*, a ritual blessing which is composed of a boiled egg, a fish, pieces of boiled meat and bread made of lentil (*va*) together with liquor to wish them happy and prosperous days ahead. Before the ritual ends, pieces of tahsi and other fruit are eaten.

Walnuts, *tahsi*, *kheluitā* and *mandala* are the crucial items of the ceremony. The mandala represents the person worshipped, the *kheluitā* his life, the *tahsi* his purity and the walnut his strength. It is necessary to keep *kheluitā* lighted until the worship is finished. It is considered a bad sign if it extinguishes during the ritual, because people link the light with a person's lifespan.[15] The Mhapūjā ceremony ends with the sweeping away of the decorated mandala simultaneously from the bottom to the top of the row and from the top to the bottom. After sweeping away the mandala, the ceremony is finished, and a family feast then starts marking the actual end of the celebration of Mhapūjā.

By celebrating Mhapūjā, people anticipate a successful and prosperous life during the coming year. The worship is also supposed to provide people with good health and a long life (Munakarmi 1975: 60). The way of celebrating this festival may vary from one family to another, but the significance of the celebration is not differently understood. Like in all other Newar festivals, women play a major role in arranging the necessary items for the worship. In my family, they also take the responsibility of worshipping all the male members of the family, while male members usually do not reciprocate such tasks. If a person is living alone he must perform his Mhapūjā himself. In such a case this can be considered a real worship of the self. Worship of the self means to recognize a god in oneself. The celebration of Mhapūjā indicates that the one who realises his capacities may turn himself into a god. To be a god means to be able to sacrifice oneself for the wellbeing of others. According to Baldev Juju, a Newar

culture specialist, the ultimate aim of a person is to attain the level of a god.[16]

During the Mhapūjā, the charitable demon king Balirāj is also worshipped (Naghabhani 1991: 44-45). A myth tells that he was pushed to the netherworld (*pātāla*) by the god Viṣṇu to prevent him from conquering heaven. By the power of his vow of giving gifts, Balirāj was about to conquer heaven. This alarmed all the gods, so one day the disguised Viṣṇu arrived at Balirāj's door as a saint and begged for some space to make three steps. Generously, Balirāj granted the disguised Viṣṇu permission to step wherever he wanted. Viṣṇu used this opportunity to deceive Balirāj. Viṣṇu covered the whole heaven with his first step and the earth by his second step, so Balirāj had nothing left his own head for Viṣṇu's third step, which enabled Viṣṇu to push Balirāj down to the netherworld. However, after this unpleasant task, Viṣṇu asked Balirāj if he had any wishes. Balirāja now requested permission to visit his kingdom once a year to see his people. Viṣṇu granted him the day of Mhapūjā as his day on earth. The myth tells that the joyous celebration of Mhapūjā is to assure king Balirāj that his people are living happily in his kingdom. Although the demon king Balirāj is respected in Nepal during the festival of Svanti many people do not agree that Nepal is Balirāj's ancient kingdom. K.B. Uday believes that the worship of Balirāj is a tradition, which has its origin in India (Uday 2000: 2).

On the day of Mhapūjā, the Parvate people in Nepal worship the "mountain of the dung of cow (*gobardhan parvat*) and the ox (*goru*). According to a myth, Lord Krishna began this tradition to commemorate the day he protected the Braja people of Gokula from Indra's attack by creating a mountain of cow dung (*gobardhan parvat*). Noted Nepalese historian, Triratna Manandhar, states that the tradition of *gobardhan pūjā* started in Nepal only during the nineteenth century i.e. during the Shah rule (AD 1769 to till date). According to Hindu mythology, Krisṇa performed *gobardhan pūjā* before the harvest in July but not after the harvest in October, as it is the case in Nepal.

Kijāpūjā (fifth day), worship of brothers: This is the final day of the five-day observance of the Yamapañcaka or Svanti festival. Today, sisters worship their brothers to bring them health, happiness and prosperity. This festival is celebrated in Nepal, not only by the Newars, but also by the Parvates and the people of the Tarāi. Among the Newars, this day is known as the day of Kijāpūjā, while the Parvates call it Bhāitikā. For most Newars, it is the occasion to worship both younger and elder brothers, but for many others it is the day to worship only their younger brothers. On this day, married sisters return to their parental homes to worship their brothers, or

brothers visit their sisters to receive worship from them. The reigning king also observes this festival by receiving *ṭikā* from his sisters. Every year, a royal astrologer announces the most auspicious moment to receive *ṭikā* from sisters, but apart from the king, people choose their own convenient time for the worship.

On the day of Kijāpūjā, together with brothers, Yama and Citragupta are worshipped. So *mandala* are drawn for them too.[17] In my family, on the day of Mhapūjā, these are placed on the top of the row of worship, but on the day of Kijāpūjā they are placed at the bottom while in the Jyāpu family I observed, their position did not change.[18] Most ingredients used at Kijāpūjā are similar to those at Mhapūjā, such as the drawing of *mandala*, oil are similar to those at Mhapūjā, such as the drawing of *mandala*, oil *mandala*, and the worship items mentioned before. The way of worshipping brothers by their sisters is also similar to Mhapūjā, but this time the actors are sisters. The most important items of the day are oil *mandala*, walnuts, *taḥsi* and *gvaysvāṃ* (a small nut-shaped flower).

Explaining *ślokas* from *Satkarma Ratnāvalī* and a traditional calendar (*pātro*), Naghabhani states that the worship of brothers by their sisters on this day is a tradition derived from the legendary worship of Yama by his day younger sister Yamunā. He thinks it is wrong to call the day 'Kijāpūjā' or 'worship of the younger brother' because the texts do not specify this aspect of brotherhood. He thinks it would be more appropriate to worship both younger and elder brothers (Naghabhani 1991: 46 and Upadhyay 1996: 225-231). Yamunā is also identified with Yamī. According to a Hindu myth, Yama and Yamī are son and daughter of Vivasvat (the sun) and Ū Saraṇyū and are twins. Yamī tried to persuade Yama to marry her, but Yama refused the proposal of an incestuous marriage, as he was afraid of being called evil (O' Flaherty 1978: 64). Another myth tells that on this day a sister was preparing a worship of her brother, but Yama, the god of death, arrived to take away her brother because his life span on earth ran out. The clever sister persuaded Yama to wait and witness the worship. She worshipped Yama together with her brother, which moved Yama. Consequently, Yama saved her brother's life. This myth tells that she requested Yama not to take away her brother until the oil *mandala* dried up and *gvaysvāṃ* faded away. People believe that a *mandala* made from oil never dries up; so nut-shaped flower (*gvaysvāṃ*) never fades away, and Yama had to give up the idea of taking away her brother. It is believed that from that time onwards sisters began worshipping their brothers on this day believing that it will bestow a long life on them. The myth makes it clear that people assume it is possible to conquer death by worshipping Yama, the god of death. Hence, this occasion can be taken as a celebration of the victory of life over death.

The day of Kijāpūjā is also meant to exchange gifts among brothers and sisters. Not only do sisters worship their brothers and bless them with happiness and a long life, but they also feed them with delicious foods, sweets, fruits, walnuts, chestnuts, betel nuts, pistachio nuts, cashew nuts, almonds, raisins, cinnamon, chocolates and cloves (*masalā pva*). In return, brothers give money or clothes or other items to their sisters.

The end of the worship of brothers is considered to be the end of the five-day long Svanti festival, but the real closure of the festival takes place on the day following Kijāpūjā. On this day, early in the morning, the final worship of Lakṣmī is performed and the *prasād* of Lakṣmī are taken out from the *āgaṃ* to be distributed among the family members. The blessings include flowers, *ṭikā*, sweets, fruits and a feast. Married daughters and sisters are also invited to receive the blessings and to attend the feast.

Significance of the rituals

Pañcaka is a Sanskrit name given to this festival, which means 'consisting of five' (Monier Williams 1988: 578). To call this festival 'Pañcaka' seems appropriate since it is celebrated for five consecutive days. 'Pañcaka' is generally considered an inauspicious period, which may occur twelve to thirteen times in a year.[19] Auspicious tasks like sowing the fields are avoided during such a period. It is considered dangerous for a family when a member dies during any of the days of the Pañcaka. People believe that in such a case as much as five members from the same family will die. To avoid such a disaster, adequate attention is given when somebody dies during a Pañcaka period: during the cremation of the dead body, eggs are added to the corpse as a substitute of human lives.

As the god of death, Yama is accountable for determining the moment of death of all the creatures in the world. Therefore, Yama's predominance during the Pañcaka festival is clear. In this regard the name 'Yamapañcaka' or 'Five days dedicated to Yama' given to the festival is significant. Pañcaka as a festival is considered a good period but, because of Yama's presence, it is not without danger. Unlike during other festivals the chief deity of this festival does not have any processions, but Yama's presence from the first day of the festival to the end is obvious. To celebrate a festival in the presence of Yama, the god of death, can be considered a most risky enterprise. Therefore, people may have taken this festival as an opportunity to appease Yama so that they receive his bliss. By worshipping Yama, people solicit his grant of a long life in the world and in heaven after one's death. Hindus believe that, as soon as one dies, one's departed soul moves to Yama's court. There all souls are judged; either they are awarded heaven or they are sent to hell. Remembering, worshipping and appeasing deceased ancestors (*pitṛ*) are dominant feature of Newar ritual life. Every morning,

sons must offer water and food to their deceased ancestors. During all major and minor festivals, the ancestors are presented food (*jugibvah*), and they are involved during any special family ceremony like marriage or other lifecycle rituals. *Śrāddha* is performed once a year to worship and feed them. Therefore, the worship of Yama, the god of death, during the Svanti festival is not to be surprised at, but is just another occasion of appeasing Yama who might otherwise cause untimely death or trouble after one's death.

However, as it is now, the main focus of the festival is not Yama, but Lakṣmī, the worship of the self and the worship of brothers. Although people celebrate this festival for five days, they consider these three days as important and to be celebrated it with pomp. Scholars agree that the Newar name 'Svanti' for this festival is derived from the words '*Svanhu Tithi*' or 'Three-day festival.' On the third day of the festival, the worship of Lakṣmī is celebrated with great fanfare. It shows, although social life in Newar society is principally represented in a religious and spiritual way, material prosperity and happiness are recognised as essential elements for social continuity.

The worship of Lakṣmī and the worship of brothers are not an unimportant part of this festival, but the Newars take Mhapūjā or the worship of the self as the most important event of the festival. Mhapūjā is only prevalent among the Newars. In many respects, Mhapūjā can be considered a unique Nepalese tradition. Worship of the self or worship of one's body (*mha*) and soul (*ātmā*) is Mhapūjā. For religious-minded people, body and soul are two different phenomena. They believe that their body is temporal while their soul is immortal. They believe that in a person a god is residing, so the worship of the self is an occasion to respect or recognise the god in oneself. The Nepalese tradition of worshipping gods and goddesses is to invoke their power (*śakti*) (Juju and Shrestha 1985: 67). Hence, the worship of the self is to understand one's capability and to utilise it for attaining the level of a god or goddess and as such to work for the betterment of human beings and the whole universe.

The fifth day's worship of brothers is another important day of this festival. This tradition is one of the most popular customs in South Asia. It is not only religiously meaningful but also significant from a social point of view, because it plays a great role in strengthening the relation between brothers and sisters. A balanced relation between brothers and sisters is one of the essential aspects of Nepalese social life. Especially the relation between married sisters and brothers is crucial. If not handled thoughtfully the bond may turn very unpleasant. In such a situation one may lose one's dignity in society. The day of Kijāpūjā provides brothers and sisters an opportunity to keep up their relationship.

One of the most important aspects of this festival is the turn of the lunar year. It is clear from our earlier discussion that celebrating the turn of the year on this day is an ancient tradition in Nepal. Therefore, it is appropriate to call this occasion the renewal of the ritual year in Nepal, because apart from two festivals, Ghyocākusalhu and Bisketjātrā,[20] all the feasts and festivals in Nepal are celebrated according to the lunar calendar. In India too, those who follow the Kārtikādi lunar calendar take this occasion as the renewal of the ritual year and celebrate it as their New Year's Day. As Tyauhār or Divālī, this is a widely celebrated festival among the Hindus in India and other countries. It could be assumed that the tradition of the celebration of the New Year might, over the years, have created the wonderful festival of Svanti or Yamapañcaka. Although Mhapūjā was invented earlier the celebration of the New Year is itself a 1127 years old tradition thanks to Saṃkhadhara Sākhvāla. 'Nepal' is now the name of present-day country. Hence it will be erroneous to call the Nepal era a Newar or Newari Saṃvat. There is no reason that only the Newars would feel proud of the Nepal era, because the name 'Nepal' implies that it belongs to all Nepalese.

Conclusion

The Svanti festival contains five major components: the worship of the crow, dog and cow; the invocation of Yama by worshipping his messengers and himself; the worship of Lakṣmī; the worship of the self on New Year's Day; and the worship of brothers. The combination of these five different ritual activities in one single festival is difficult to explain. The most obvious feature of this festival is the presence of Yama. However, if we consider this to be the festival of Yama only, then the worship of Lakṣmī, the self and brothers cannot logically be fitted in. Crow, dog and cow are in one way or other related to Yama and his realm, therefore their worship during this festival makes sense, but Yama's worship together with that of the self and that of brothers is difficult to comprehend. The relation between two ritual sequels, the worship of the self and the worship of brothers, is not clear to me either. Although the nature of worship during these two days is similar, the actors who carry out the rituals are different; so the meanings of each ritual are different too. Why the worship of the self and brothers occurs after the worship of Lakṣmī is also not understandable.

Yama is invoked throughout the festival but his absence at the time of Lakṣmī's worship is a puzzle. The reason may be that people prefer forgetting death when they are engaged in worshipping wealth or are otherwise busy with material life.

Since people are busy honouring Yama from the first to the final day of the festival this festival can more appropriately be called the celebration of Yama. In this regard the name 'Yamapañcaka' is a most suitable name for

this festival. Yama as the god of death is considered to be a less compassionate divinity. People know that death is inevitable but they like to avoid it as far as possible. It is clear that the real motive behind the invocation of Yama at the time of the New Year's celebration or during the worship of the self is to plead for the continuation of life for another year. Similarly, the worship of Yama together with the worship of brothers is also thought to obtain his blessings for the good health and life of brothers. These two events can be considered the celebration of life, albeit with the mercy of Yama, the god of death. By worshipping him, people try to subjugate the power of death. It is significant that Mhapūjā is performed as the first ritual of the New Year and that people pray for health, long life, happiness and prosperity in the year to come. Yama's worship on such an occasion is meaningful, because he is the god who possesses the power of determining people's life span in the world and their fate after death. Yama's acceptance of being worshipped as a protective god during this festival can be taken as his willingness for showing his compassion towards human beings. Compassion towards human beings shown by the god of death may be called the defeat of death. In this regard, the worship of the self and the worship of brothers can both be considered as the overcoming of death. Hence we can consider the festival of Svanti as the celebration of the victory of life over death.

As we discussed above, during this festival the Amāntaka-based lunar Year is changed symbolising the change of ritual cycle. Therefore we can say that the festival of Svanti is also the renewal of the ritual cycle in Nepal.

Notes

1. I carried out my research as a PhD candidate at the Research School of Asian,
   - African, and Amerindian Studies (CNWS), University of Leiden, the Netherlands. I am grateful to Prof. Dr. D.H.A. Kolff and Dr. Sjoerd Zanen of University of Leiden, the Netherlands for their helpful comments to earlier drafts of this paper. I express my gratitude to Prof. Dr. Triratna Manandhar of Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu Nepal for reviewing and providing useful suggestions to an earlier version of this paper. For more on Nepalese festivals, see (Anderson 1971; Calise 1982; Gellner 1992: 213-220; Lewis 1984: 337-441; Nepali 1965: 343-413; R. Pradhan 1986: 286-416; Shrestha 2002: 211-268; Toffin 1984: 501-554; A. Vajracarya 1988 and P. Vajracarya 1979).
2. See (P. Sharma 1997: 153-4 and Vajracarya and Malla: 1985 folio 21, 23, 29, 56, 61 and 63).
3. See Ishii (1993) for a comparison of annual festivals celebrated among Parvate Hindus, Newars and Mithili, the three major ethnic groups of Nepal.
4. Many inscriptions from the Licchavī period (4th to 9th century) provide ample examples of the tradition of religious festivals in Nepal (Vajracarya and Malla 1985: 82-87).
5. Pundit Ashakaji (Ganeshraj) Vajracarya (1988) copied and translated this book into the Newar language from the original text. The translator states that Pandit

Kañthānānda Brāmhan had originally compiled this book in Sanskrit. See also Levy (1992: 411-417) and Anderson (1977: 164-174) for Svanti festival.
6. Lewis (1984: 395-403) called it a six-day festival but he has recorded only five days of activities. See Toffin (1984: 538-542) for his interpretation of this festival in Panauti. C. Vajracarya (2000: 133-55) presents the festival as celebrated among the Newar Buddhist Vajracaryas in Kathmandu. See Nepali (1965 381-383) for his observation of Mhapūjā and a comparison of Newar Kijāpūjā with the Parvates' Bhāitikā. More on Bhāiṭikā among the Parvates see Bennett (1983: 246-252). See Ishi (1993: 74-77) for a comparison of celebrating this festival between the Mithila, the Parvate Hindus and the Newars.
7. Janaipūniamā is celebrated on the full-moon day of the Gumlā month in August. On this day, the Brahmins change their sacred threads (janai) and distribute threads to general people.
8. A. Sharma (1987: 11) deals with the general worship of Lakṣmī. Naghabhani (1991: 48-71) critically examines the tradition of worshipping Lakṣmī in Nepal, but he does not provide clear references to his sources.
9. According to the famous Nepalese traditional painter Premman Citrakar she is Suvarṇa Lakṣmī. See also (Naghabhani 1991: 65).
10. See more on the Nepal Era (B. Pradhan 1979: 1-6 and 1998: 29, Slusser 1982: 389 and Vajracarya & Malla 1985: 236).
11. However, the Vikram era began to be used in minting only since 1911 AD (B. Pradhan 1998: 30).
12. In 1928 AD, for the first time Dharmaditya Dharmacarya (Jagatman Vaidya) proposed in his magazine *Buddhadharma va Nepālabhāsā* to celebrate the New Year's day of Nepal Saṃvat as a national event. See Nepālbhāṣā Maṃkāḥ Khalaḥ (NMK 1993: 65).
13. According to "Sthirobhava-Vakya" these household items represent one or other deities too (Slusser 1982: 421).
14. In Newar households, worshipping of Gaṇeśa is essential before beginning any ritual activity.
15. For his interpretations of *kheluitā* see Gvamga (1999: 1-5).
16. He views that many Tāntrik deities that are worshipped today were once human beings (Juju and Shrestha 1985: 1-9), for his views on Svanti see (Juju and Shrestha 1985: 60-68).
17. Many also consider them only the messengers of Yama and Śiva (Yamadut and Śivadut). In his study, Nepali (1965: 383) found elder brothers were regarded as Yamrāj and younger one as Citragupta among the Newars, but I did not encounter with any such interpretations.
18. This position may vary from one family to another, and does not seem to be meaningful.
19. During the period of each two *nakṣatra* or 'Lunar Mansion' one 'Pañcaka' is counted. *Nakṣatra* are constellations of fixed stars. There are twenty-seven main *nakṣatra* but some astrologers also consider them as twenty-eight (Behari 2003: 169-251).
20. These two festivals are celebrated according to solar-based Vikram calendar.

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RESEARCH NOTE

ESCALATING INEQUALITY IN SOUTH ASIA: A CHALLENGE TO POLITICAL MANAGERS

Ayaz Muhammad

Introduction

In this era of modern technology and communication no one can deny the importance of equal and equitable distribution of resources. This is considered an essential feature of democratic as well as dictatorial regimes. The notion of equity is often correlated with justice. Rawls (1971) explains that the primary subject of justice is the way in which principal economic and social arrangements distribute fundamental rights and duties in a society so that: (i) each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive basic liberty compatible with a similar liberty for others (ii) social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both reasonably expected to be to everyone's advantage. In social and economic terms, everyone is assumed to be equal to fulfill everyone's basic needs giving 'essentially equal treatment for equal cases'. Hence under the first condition economically and socially just world would fulfill the basic needs of everyone. This notion of equity is grounded in the concept of social justice, which represents a belief that there are some things which people should have, that there are basic needs that should be fulfilled, that burdens and rewards should not be spread too divergently across the community, and that policy should be directed with impartiality, fairness and justice towards these ends.[1] Solow (1992) considers the equity as intergenerational issue of 'who gets what' and labels it 'distributional equity'. The equity also encompasses relationship of human species to the natural system of which humans are a part. This conception of equity demands equity between the environment, the economy and the societal good, equity between less developed nations with natural resources and developed nations with excess demand for these resources, equity between those who economically have plenty and those who suffer in poverty, equity between urban demands and agricultural space, equity between humans and all living species. This list of equity issues goes without limits. Each group and individual raising questions about equity from their particular points of interest trying to discover what is just and fair within their own framework. Shrader-Frechette (2000) expands the circle of equity up to future generations. He observes that the equity is grounded, in part, on a social-contract theory that according to which all humans share a social contract by virtue of being members of same species and sharing the same interests and

resources; as a consequence, members of all generations deserve equal treatment. The strong emphasis on equity requires sturdy role of precautionary principle. For example, precautionary principle suggests the possibility to give up or change a technological path in case equity principle is in danger. It is argued that this will only be possible, if decisions are equitable, as such decisions generally carry greater legitimacy and encourage parties with differing interests to cooperate better in carrying out mutually agreed actions.

Responsibility of Rich Nations

Prevailing inequity among different countries and among different communities within a nation is one of the most urgent and thorny problems today faced by the developing countries. The national perspective of intra-generational equity requires that the well-being of strong groups will not be at the expense of weaker segments of the society. To the developing countries this social dimension of sustainable development seems the most important and challenging.[2] Ikeme (2003: 195-206) and Agyeman et al. (2003) put the responsibility on the shoulders of rich countries to narrow the gap. It is argued that based on *'polluter pays'* principle the industrialized countries should contribute not only to the costs to help protect it but also to help the poor countries to gain access to the economic benefits derived from the use of these resources so that as beneficiaries of the planetary legacy, all members of the present generation are entitled to equitable access to the legacy. Intergenerational justice requires wealthier countries to assist impoverished ones in realizing such access and enjoying UN defined *development* and as 'the social progress and better standards of living in larger freedom'. This may be reflected in various terms aimed at a fair and just utilization of natural resources and maintaining their diversity, and equitable distribution of economic benefits across different countries. Lot of production and consumption is going on in wealthier industrialized countries putting excessive strain on the sources.[3] Rayner and Malone (2001) go beyond the financial equity and talk about the need of social justice. Equity is not just about how societies distribute resources. It is also the basis for generating social capital along with economic, natural, and intellectual capital, for sustainability". One can conclude from these views that:

- Lock's and Rousseau's social contract theories which laid down the foundation of present democratic state indicate that human beings are equal and have equal rights. So equality/equity is an essential aspect of the state, which has to be dealt on the bases of humanity.

- In present global village this phenomena should be dealt at international level. Otherwise it will travel with its all drawbacks to rich countries by ship which is transporting exploited resources of poor countries through unjust policies to them.

- Equity should not be limited to present generation. It should also encompass the intergenerational equity (future generation).

- It is an established fact that equal and equitable distribution of resources in various regions and groups of people can ensure sustainable development, and alleviate the poverty along with others on sustainable bases from society.

- Equity/Equality is a pre-requisite for good governance.

South Asia in the family of regions

Despite the fact that almost all socio-political, economic and religious scholars, planers and leaders are of the opinion that there should be economic and political equality/equity from grass root level to global level on the basis of humanity, even a strong group talks about intergenerational equality/equity. But unfortunately, inter-regional and inter-country level inequality/inequity is increasing day by day. The following Data explains the position of South Asia in the family of regions. South Asia Constants 22.36 per cent population while GNI 2.14 per cent of the world in 2004. East Asia and the Pacific (EAP) population 29.48 per cent while GNI is only 6.00 per cent, Eastern Europe and Central Asia (EECA) population 7.44% while GNI is 3.90 per cent, Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) population 8.53 per cent while GNI is 4.89 per cent, Middle East and North Africa (MENA) population 4.63 per cent while GNI is 1.48 per cent, Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) population 11.33 per cent while GNI is only 1.09 per cent, High Income (HI) population is only 15.77 per cent while GNI is 80.50 per cent of the world in 2004. One can also observe the wide gap by considering Per Capita GNI factor in 2004. South Asia US $ 590 EAP US $ 1280, EECA US$ 3290, LAC 3600, MENA 2000, SSA 600 and HIG enjoys 32,040 (Table 1). This phenomenon shows that South Asia mean 22.6 per cent of the world population leading very miserable life. The condition of other regions is also not good. This situation demands that High Income Group should play its role to lessen the gap between poor and rich countries to enable them at least to provide minimum standard of life to their people.

Table 1: Population and (GNI) of Various Regions/Countries[4]

Region/ Country	Population		Gross national income (GNI)		
	In million 2004	% of world population 2004	In billion US$ 2004	% of world GNI 2004	Per capita GNI in US$ 2004
South Asia	1418.5	22.36	854.1	2.14	590*
East Asia and the Pacific	1870.2	29.48	2389.4	6.00	1280
Eastern Europe and Central Asia	472.1	7.44	1553.3	3.90	3290
Latin America and the Caribbean	541.3	8.53	1948.1	4.89	3600
Middle East and North Africa	294.0	4.63	588.6	1.48	2000
Sub-Saharan Africa	719.0	11.33	432.0	1.09	600
High Income	1000.8	15.77	32064	80.50	32040
World	6345.1	100.00	39833.6	100.00	6280

*Source: Human Development Report, 2005. * SAARC Countries including Afghanistan*

South Asia is suffering from interregional, intra-region and intra-nation financial as well as political inequality/inequity. Obviously it is impossible to meet the challenge while the planners, policymakers and political mangers are bound to feed the 22.36 per cent population of the world with 2.14 per cent GNI of the world. So, it is responsibility of the international community, rich states particularly, high income group and world institutions to formulate policy to shift some resources to less developed countries to narrow the gap between poor and rich nations and to enable the state apparatus in less develop countries to overcome the problem of poverty as well as inequality/inequity in their respective nations.

South Asia Inter–Country and Intra–Country Conditions
South Asia there is a bit progress in the factor of poverty alleviation, but it is alarming that inequality is increasing in the countries of the region. One can witness individual to individual, group to group, urban to rural, city to city and intra city, village to village and intra village, region to region and intra regional disparities and inequalities in all the South Asian countries. These inequalities are main source of political instability, cthic, moral, political, economic and administrative corruption, hindrance in good governance, above all breeding ground of violence and terrorism. It is a hard falt that in these countries there is a lot of gap between expectations of the people from the

government and sources of the government which leads to a vacuum and this vacuum turns out explosion, disaster and debacle. Following figures indicate the dreadful condition of this region.

The Income/Consumption Inequality by Quintile Groups indicates that in Bangladesh, 20% poorest share of income or consumption in 1981-82 was 6.6 and in 2004 that was decreased to 4.7% and the share of 20% richest in 1981-82, was 45.3% and in 2004, increased up to 52.0%. Bhutan the poorest share in 2004, 6.5% and richest 48.7%, in India the poorest share in 1990, 9.46% in 2004, a slight increase 9.52% and richest share in 1990, 37.8% and in 2004, a slight increase here as well 38.5%, in the Maldives the poorest in 1997, 10.0% and in 2004, 11.0% (the richest data is not available), in Nepal the poorest in 1995-96, 7.6% in 2003/04, decrease to 6.2% and the richest 1995-96, 44.9% in 2003/04, increase up to 53.4%, in Pakistan the poorest in 1988, 8.0% and in 2002, 7.0% the richest in 1988, 43.7% and in 2002 increased up to 47.6%, in Sri Lanka the poorest share of consumption in 1995-96, 7.2% and in 2002, 6.2% the riches in 1995-96, 44.4% and in 2002, 48.5% (table 2) One can conclude from the following data that:

- there is minor increase in income consumption share of the 20% poorest in the Maldives and India but slight decrease in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka;

- there is increase in the income consumption share of the 20% richest in all the countries;

- the 60% population in the middle is sufferer, which is always back bone of any economy and objective of equality/equity is to enhance and strengthen this class. So, the case is almost reverse in the region;

- It is evident that the 20% richest are not ready to share surplus income to lower classes. They are struggling to preserve or strengthen their existing position. It is a hard fact that National and international institutional policies are favoring them. There is need to change their psychology in favour of downtrodden people, which is in better interest of poor as well as rich in the long run.

Table 2: Income/Consumption Inequality by Quintile Groups and GNI Index[5]

Country	Share of income or consumption						GNI Index	
	Poorest 20%		Richest 20%		Ratio of richest to poorest			
	Earlier Year	Latest Year	Earlier Year	Latest Year	Earlier Year	Latest Year	Earlier Year	Latest Year
Bangladesh	6.6 (1981-82)	4.7 (2004)	45.3 (1981-82)	52.0 (2004)	6.9 (1981-82)	11.1 (2004)	0.39 (1981-82)	0.45 (2004)
Bhutan	-	6.5 (2004)	-	48.7 (2004)	-	7.6 (2004)	0.37 (2000)	0.42 (2004)
India	9.46 (1990)	9.52 (2000)	37.58 (1990)	38.5 (2000)	4.0 (1990)	4.0 (2000)	0.28 (1990)	0.28 (2000)
The Maldives	10.0 (1997)	11.0 (2004)	-	-	-	-	0.42 (1997)	0.41 (2004)
Nepal	7.6 (1995/96)	6.2 (2003/04)	44.9 (1995/96)	53.4 (2003/04)	5.9 (1995/96)	8.6 (2003/04)	0.34 (1995/96)	0.41 (2003/04)
Pakistan	8.0 (1988)	7.0 (2002)	43.7 (1988)	47.6 (2002)	5.5 (1988)	6.8 (2002)	0.35 (1988)	0.41 (2002)
Sri Lanka[6] 1. Share of HH Income	5.4 (1995/96)	4.8 (2002)	50.3 (1995/96)	52.8 (2002)	9.3 (1995/96)	11.0 (2002)	0.46 (1995/96)	0.47 (2002)
2. Share of HH Consumption	7.2 (1995/96)	6.2 (2002)	44.5 (1995/96)	48.5 (2002)	6.2 (1995/96)	7.8 (2002)	0.34[7] (1995/96)	0.33[8] (2002)

Source: RPP 2005.

The condition of intra-country regional disparities is also frightening. For examples: population and area wise the biggest country of the region, India, is badly suffering from this syndrome. Resultantly, the government writ is very weak more or less in 67 districts. These districts are run by some ethno-national and ideological powerful armed groups. They are used to collect taxes from the people, law and order is at the mercy of them. The main cause, along with others is the poverty, financial inequality, inequity and disparity. A large number of military is engaged in these areas. According to available figures in 2002-2003, all-India per capita GDP was US $ 480; the poorest seven states (accounting for 55% of the population) had a per-capita GDP that was two thirds the national average, while in the richest seven states (33% of the population) per-capita GDP was nearly double that of the poorest seven states. In the two largest and poorest northern states (Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, 25% of total population) per-capita GDP was less than half the national average and only a third of the richest 7 states. The .four southern states, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu (21 per cent of the total

population), at an average, enjoyed more than twice the GDP per capita of the quarter of the population concentrated in the two poorest northern states. Furthermore, with average GDP growth rates of 5%, the southern states are galloping ahead of the poorest but populous northern states with growth rates of only 2%. This threatens to further increase the poverty gap in the two regions; currently, head count poverty in the poorest northern states and the better off southern states is 35% and 18% respectively.[9] Nepal can be separated in three main regions Himalayan, Hills and Terai area.[10] There is lot of disparities in these regions. Again there is large gape between standard of living in Kathmandu valley and other areas. In Pakistan urban and rural disparity can be observed from the case of Punjab the largest province of Pakistan. It represents different cultures and socio-political pattern as well as economic development in various regions. However, inequality between urban and rural areas is quite visible in the province. Local government income and expenditure factor illustrates that in 1981-82, the population of urban local government were 26.5 per cent who their income was 77.5 and expenditure was 77.3% respectively ? The population of rural councils was 73.5%, their income was 22.5% and expenditure was 22.5% respectively, of total Punjab local government income and expenditure (Table 2). The condition of other provinces in Pakistan was more or less the same.

Table 3: Population, Income and Expenditure of Urban and Rural Councils in the Punjab, Pakistan (1981-82)[11]

Council	Population % age	Income % age	Expenditure % age
Urban Councils	26.5	77.5	77.3
Rural councils	73.5	22.5	22.7

In 2002 the government restructured local government institution according to which the government amalgamated the rural and urban councils in one unit and came up with more financial resources to feed this tier of government by adopting vertical technique to reduce inter district and intra district inequality in the country, which brought a bit change in the situation. As a matter of fact one can witness these disparities in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, India, Nepal, Bhutan, Maldives and Afghanistan. The case of Afghanistan is more complex that this country has been battle field from 1979 to 1989. Unfortunately, this war devastated the country more than other countries by considering all economic and political indicators in 21 century.

The overall condition of the rural South Asia is miserable and needs some special package for development. Moreover, the intra-district disparities in development are also wide spread. For instance, the villages that are close to the headquarters of the district are more developed than those that are far flung. South Asia is not only suffering from inter-city disparities, it also plagued with intra-city disparities. More or less all big cities of the region

have localities, residents of which are enjoying more or less standard services. In contrast, there are many slums in these cities, where Dwellers are waiting even for conservancy services, inhabitants do not have access to clean water to drink and natural gas to cook the food. There are numerous complaints that in these areas over-flowing sewerage systems are converting these cities into dirty ponds. These intra-city disparities are rampant almost everywhere through the region. However severity could be different in different countries and in different cities. Likewise, disparities and differences can be observed in most of the rural areas. The overall condition of the rural South Asia is miserable and needs some special package for development. Moreover, the intra-district disparities in development are also wide spread. For instance, the villages that are close to the headquarters of the district are more developed than those that are far flung.

Suggestions for National Equity

The challenge posed by this national perspective of equality/equity could be addressed by ensuring that suggested financial policy should provide distributive equity in socio-economic terms with a special care of interests of the weaker segments of society. The poor and women in particular have been identified as disproportionately vulnerable as the result of unequal access to and control over resources. Economic and gender-related equity issues need to be addressed in public policy modeling to ensure equitable impact of suggested policy. To achieve the objective of bridging the gap between the strong and weaker segments of a 'nation state', explicit modeling of income distribution must ensure that the impact of suggested policy is to everyone's advantage. There is need to analyze that how much these factors influence the public policy modeling. Public policy architect should consider these factors and evolve the public policy model, which must have capacity to absorb internal and external shocks of the system; containing ability to deliver positive results for macro and micro level development and having capacity for distribution of resources based on equity to ensure sustainable development at national, regional as well as global level.

There are several views dominant to reduce income inequality as follows:

- The redistributionist view: according to redistribution view, to which communists and leftists give weight, poverty and income inequality in society can be reduced through redistribution of resources.
- The moral underclass view: according to this view supported by some neo-liberals, see poverty and exclusion as a result of the behaviours of the individuals themselves and their sub culture.
- The social integrationist view: according to this inequality in society can be minimized by mainstreaming the poor and marginalized ones into the development process and by providing equal opportunity to all

for their advancement. In general an inclusive society will reduce inequality and enhance development by providing equal opportunities to all, especially, poor and marginalized, in the socio-economic and cultural development, and in the government of the country.

- Islam believes in external as well as internal purification of individual. It has its own formula of social and economic justice. According to its suggested model it ensure flow of money from rich to poor in the long run by forbidding usury and make binding Zakat (the rich will pay two and half% of surplus money to weaker section of society in shape of money, education, protection, food, clothing, shelter, to lift up the marginalized group of the society to include them in socio, economic and cultural development process), Ushar (5% of net income from agriculture crops from artificially irrigated land and 10% from naturally irrigated lands. This amount will also be distributed among weaker section of society according to the mentioned formula) This is not limited to one particular nation. It is for humanity. It mean if some nation has surplus amount it has to transfer it to other nation, and encouraging Sadqat, Khairat etc. Women are delaclared weaker section of society all over the world. Islam believe in women economic and political empowerment by declaring their rights of property, women right to husband, widow rights etc. on permanent bases. In the same way children and senior citizen rights also save weaker section of the society. All these along with other promote intra state and interstate equality and equity.

a. Islam neither snatches everything from the rich to distribute to the weaker section of society. Obviously, this lays down the foundations of enmity between classes and promotes chaos and violence at national as well as international levels.

b. Nor unbridle the rich to pile-up its assets by collecting usury, which is ultimately paid by weaker section of the society to the rich and widens the gape between them. This gap breeds discontent, frustration and annoyance in down-trodden people and ultimately leads to violence, chaos and anarchy at national as well as international level. As it is happening in present era around the world.

c. Islam believes in the process of social inclusion. The process of social inclusion will bring these individuals, groups and communities in the national mainstream, will reduce inequality between them and rest of the society, will increase their self-esteem and will create a development oriented society based on the principles of equality, social justice and human rights.

- Policy makers and planners to construct model by considering all above ideologies.

a. It must be poor friendly and compatible to the existing requirements. Containing capacity to address the indigenous problems and issues of respective state by involving the civil as well as state society.

b. This must encompass to up lift all marginalized ethno-regional groups and other weaker section of the society,

c. International community should contribute to reduce the gape between less developed and developed countries to ensure intergenerational and intra-generational equality/equity.

Good Governance: Good governance itself means a rule-based, corruptionless, equitable, transparent, accountable, responsive and efficient government system in which all the individuals groups and communities including women, the poor and the marginalized ones are fully integrated in the decision making process and development activities. The central objective of such government is to safeguard the civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights of the people. In South Asia a small group of political elites is governing in all regional states including India. The tools and mechanism applied to sustain their power could be different in different countries. There is need to ensure effective participation of the weaker sections of the societies in decision making process. all South Asian nations are lands of heterogeneous people. These all ethno-linguistic, religious and cultural groups may be accepted and provided effective role in decision making bodies and opportunity for equal political and economic development.

Local Government: The institution of local governments can play positive and valuable role in this regard to ensure good governance and to promote equality/equity. Because, these little governments are close to people of respective localities and manage their immediate activities. Following the principle of good governance provide basic social services, such as health, education, drinking water and sanitation to the people, and work for their cultural development. These government works on the principle of double accountable, accountable to the people and accountable to higher tier of the governments. Therefore, if political, administrative and fiscal decentralization is carried out properly, and if these local governments are provided with sufficient financial resources and technical know-how to implement social, economic and cultural development programmes in the local area, these institutions will be able to contribute to the objective of providing social, economic and cultural rights to the people and creating an inclusive, harmonious and just society.

The governments should empower and equip this institution to provide economic services through the development of infrastructure–rural roads, micro and small irrigation systems and micro hydro projects– protect the environment and create a good atmosphere for the generation on income and

productive employment, especially for the poor, women and marginalized communities by following a pro-poor growth approach.

Local government should be strengthened through political, administrative and fiscal decentralization. It should be accepted and its capacity should be enhanced as an agent of economic development. A reasonable share of governments sources should be allocated to these institutions to implement vertical financial equality in their respective states. The capacity of these institutions should be developed in important areas, such as, pro poor growth, good governance, human rights and social inclusion so that they will be able to deliver the basic social, economic and cultural services to the people, beside providing opportunity to all, especially the poor and marginalized.

Measures at International Level
It is an undeniable fact that equality/equity can not be attained without financial contribution and poor friendly fiscal and political efforts of international community. Especially rich nations have to take practical steps. It is positive that International community realizes this fact and making efforts to overcome this problem. But these efforts are not bearing desired fruit. Following suggestions could be adopted for desired results:

- Planners and policy makers should be educated and realize that reduction in inequality/inequity from the world is in the national interest of all nations. They should consider it "long run security measure" at the intra-nation and international level.
- The money contributed in this regard is always called donors amount. This may be called money allocated for national and global sustainable security. Because, reduction of inequality/inequity is the best defense of any nation, global community and humanity. This is the best to use soft power to avoid from any destructive revolution, threats of terrorism and violence and any emerging insurgency and war at national or international level.
- US who achieved the status of world political and economic hegemonic power. To sustain this status, it is essential to up lift Less Developed Countries (LDC) and their people up to the level of respectable survival or minimum standard of life by using soft power. But, unfortunately, after the suspension of cold war US policy makers adopted a bit aggressive policy, especially, under the president Bush leadership. Policy makers are slightly more inclined in use of hard power. This aggressive style promoted mistrust, suspicions and uncertainty among the allied as well as other nations and enhanced insecurity of individuals in LDCs as well as developed countries. Obviously, statuesque in world power politics is in favour of US. So, it is responsibility of the US to maintain statuesque. It can be done by using

soft power and by reducing inequalities at national as well as international level.

- International institutions that make and implement policies in this regard are dominated by powerful nations. Naturally, they formulate policies, which are suited to their current national interest. Effective participation of less developed countries may be ensured in decision making process according to democratic norms by adopting some democratic formula.
- It is observed that the powerful industrialized countries force the poor and weak countries to follow international treaties which are not respected by some other powerful industrialized countries as well. This kind of treaties always protects the interest of rich nations and Emphasis on the long run tends to ignore current inequalities/inequities, should be formulated and existing should be modified in the better interest of humanity.
- Rich countries and International institutions floated schemes debt for less develop countries to reduce poverty and for intra-generational equity, but these schemes are also have many weaknesses. There are many loopholes through which the flow of money is from poor to rich in shape of feasibilities reports, interest, experts' emoluments etc. Rich countries and the international financial institutions (IFIs) like World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) promise 'social progress and better standards of living' when extending loans to debtor countries but they withhold 'larger freedom' of these countries by imposing conditionalties, for example structural adjustment program of IMF, that effectively gets debt sustainability prioritized over sustainability of human welfare in debtor countries. The implication of the international context of intra-generational equity for the purpose of public policy model is to structure such a 'just' financial policy for a 'nation state' that may help her minimize the debt reliance and its consequent conditionalities.
- As far as intergenerational equality/equity is concerned, which is an important responsibility of present generation could be achieved by the developed countries. It is obvious that the countries strangulated by poverty have neither the capacity nor desire to fulfill intergenerational equity when they cannot even attain their needs today. So, international community should surrender a small portion of their surplus capital in favour of less developed countries to carry equity and equality in present generation. This will help the less developed countries to withdraw their present generation from poverty and enable them to save natural resources for future generations of entire world.

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RESEARCH NOTE

WOMEN IN ARMED CONFLICT: LESSONS TO BE LEARNT FROM TELANGANA PEOPLE'S STRUGGLE

Uddhab P. Pyakurel

This essay elaborates and compares the role of women in two political movements–the Maoist movement in Nepal and the Telengana people's struggle in India. The first is an ongoing struggle while the latter is a struggle which started in the middle of 1946 and lasted for five years until it was called off in October 1951 after the involvement of the Indian army. This paper is confined to the scenario of women's participation, their feelings and some push and pull factors for joining in the struggles. Apart from that, this paper explores the participants' views on the movement, their leaders, policy, and the programme of their parties for favouring their participation. The women's condition after the end of Telangana movement after the party forgot it's earlier promise has also tried to bring it out as concerned matter for discussion. This paper concludes by bringing out some bitter experiences of the women participants of Telengana movement, and tries to make the Maoists aware of escaping such a harassing experience. Before going to examine both the struggle, first, let me introduce both the struggle-in brief!

Telangana People's struggle

Under the British, India was ruled basically by two types of rulers: (a) the British administered provinces of India known as British India and (b) 'princely India' or those state governed by princes, maharajas, rajas, and nababs. Among them, Hydarabad was the largest one, which was under the Nizam prince, and Telangana is one out of three linguistic regions–Telagu, Marathwada and Kannada – of Hydarabad. The Telangana revolt began in the middle of 1946 and lasted for five years. It was an armed resistance of women and men to the feudal oppression or against the princely state in Telangana. It was a struggle against the autocratic rule of Nizam and the *Zamindari system*.[1] There were three types of land holding systems–*sarf-e-khas* (the land controlled by Nizam and his family from where revenues collected were used for their personal expenses) and *Jagirs* (the land which has given to *Jagirdars*) and *diwani* or government land. *Jagirdars* were those who were loyal to the Nizam enjoying their own police, revenue, civil and criminal systems. They had received *Jagirs* and become revenue officers or generals in the army. They also had right over forest and fisheries, and exercised police and judicial functions. Having all the power they compelled

people to various illegal exactions and forced labours. The peoples' conditions of *Jagir* areas were far more oppressed than in the *sarf-e-khas* lands; the *jagirdars* and their agents were free to collect a variety of illegal taxes from the actual cultivators. *Jagir* lands were even above the jurisdiction of civil courts. There was also the *Vetti* (free services to the proprietors) system. Every peasant was compelled to contribute Vetti to the Zamindar. Only after completing operations on the landlord's fields, peasants and labourers could work for themselves. A tenant and his family had a compulsion to leave food in their plate and go to the landlord whenever called.

Women were more suppressed under this rule. Women were not allowed to feed their babies while working in the landlord's field. Women were repressed, not only in the field of free work or Vetti, but also sexually harassed and exploited. There were many examples of such suppression; if the landlord fancied a woman, she was taken as a consort. Sleeping with the landlord on the first night was a compulsion to newly married women. It was the landlords' prerogative. So, peasant women, along with men, came into the Andra Maha Sabha (AMS) and started an armed struggle against the 'oppressive feudal system and the fundamentalist militia of the Nizam- the Razkars".

In 1928, people established Andhra Maha Sabha converting it from the Andhra Jana Sangam, which was established in 1921 with the objectives of social and cultural uplift of the Telugu people. It changed not only the name but also the objectives from socio-cultural to political activity. Earlier, it was common organization to all – The RSS, Congress and even to the non-political – who wanted change in society. In 1930, the Andra Mahila Sabha and, in 1937, the Mahila Nav Jivan Mandal had formed in co-ordination with AMS. These organizations are credited to bring women into the movement. During 1940-42, some important leaders of the AMS went under the communist leadership and assumed AMS into the character of a mass organization. AMS went into an armed struggle with decision made in November 1946. The struggle was extended form of grass root level resistance, using local weapons to resist against the regime. The movement was also considered in which "the Mao's thought was first put into practice out of China" (Louis 2002:49). The first struggle took place to support Ailimma, a women who was threatened by landlord's *Goondas*, taking up of local arms e.g. *lathis*, slings and stones for volunteers and pounding sticks and chilly powder for the women as well. Later, volunteer squads were not only formed but also trained in using these kinds of weapons. They started to make local weapons professionally. They even used modern weapons. Several struggles took place between squads and Nizam's supporters. The rebels seized arms 'raiding police stations and landlord's houses'. But women did not leave their strategy to use local means to defend themselves

against the police. Women used to attack the police with pots full of chilly powder.

Ruler's oppression was not a single cause of women's participation in the revolt. Women-oriented programmes of Sanghams were other reasons; when such women's issues like wife-beating, early marriage of child age come up, the Shangam immediately called the people concerned, held debates and resolved the matters. Misbehaviour to the women was started to be severely punished. These rules were practiced even in their organization which attracted women to join the Shangam. For instance, Shankar, a member of organization was accused of raping and mismanaging the party funds, and faced the firing squad. According to them, these punishments were declared by the people themselves as the correct line of action.

"Large number of peasants spontaneously participated in the struggle directed against the government, landlords and their agents. The insurgents had neither firearms nor training but were required to use them. A few volunteers' corps had come into existence, which were not so much well organized guerrilla squads, but ad hoc formation in response to the situation. Initially the revolt was spasmodic" (Dhanaghare 1983: 195) and later it became regular and usual between the people and state security forces when the rebellion received support from all, especially the women. By such enthusiastic participation both men and women, they were able to carry some social transformations in the society. They ousted several police stations from the village, *Vetti* was abolished and thousands of acres of land distributed, debts to be paid were dismissed. The struggle could not reached in the aim of the organizer; when the Indian union armies were deployed against the Nizam, the movement also started to face lots of troubles. After the Nizam surrender in September 1948 to the Indian Army, the communists and the movement became the target of the Indian Union Army. Then, the party and its cadre were compelled to leave the villages. Party tried to organize the tribal people for fighting against the local governmental institutions e.g. forest officials and moneylenders "who subjected them to exploitation". However, it was not an alternative to continue emergency. The politburo of the party, finally, took the decision on 21 October 1951 to call off the struggle citing "the increased repression by the Indian union army."

The Maoists Movement in Nepal

The Maoist insurgency, for the last ten years, spread all over the country. Some 15,000 people have already lost their lives since 13 February 1996. The cost of reconstruction of development infrastructure, until 2003, that was destroyed by the Maoists, is estimated to be NRs. 200 billion[2]. Developmentalists argue that the Maoist insurgency 'is basically a social and economic issue and is produced and sustained by failed development' (Pandey 1999:12). It is true that the epicenter and heartland of the Maoist

insurgency is Mid-west hill districts—Rolpa, Rukum, Salyan, Dailekh, Jajarkot etc. – which the Human Development index categorizes as the lowest rank districts of the country (NESAC 1998: 264-65). Not only this but also some political exclusions and brutal human rights violations are also fostering factors for the insurgency.

The involvement of women in the People's War (PW) lacks reliable data to determine the actual%age of women in different roles within the organization. Even statistics given by the Maoists are different from leader to leader. Hisila Yami, the central committee member of the Maoists, has given tentative data by writing, "the participation of the women in people's liberation army are from 30 to 40 per cent" (Yami 2006: 66). For Sapana, company commander, more than 40 per cent are women in the People's Liberation Army (Mulyankan, Bhadra 2061: 14), and for Uma Bhujel, a central member who broke Gorkha jail and came back under open sky, the ratio is approximately 40 per cent in army and more than 50 per cent in other field (Ibid: 16). This is more closer to the number of figures in party and militia comprising approximately 40 per cent and in autonomous government and in industries, the number is above 50 per cent (Janadesh 2006: 8).

Here, a question must be raised about the causes, which inspired or compelled Nepali women to join the movement. It is said that some women are forced to join the Maoist movement by the Maoist and some are compelled to join by misbehaviour of the security forces. For example, Ganga and Sobha Thapa, who were 16 years old each and studying in grade nine in Satakhana School of Surkhet district, were abducted by the Maoist on 29 September, 2005[3]. Shanti 16, Resmi 16 and Binita 15 are the examples of how the security personnel irritated the students and general people.[4] Brutal suppressions of security forces have also encouraged young girls to join the militia either for their own security or for taking revenge. Being revengeful after the murder of their relatives by the security forces, women have participated in the Maoist organization. Sarita is a perfect example to support the argument. She took gun after her innocent brother was killed by the army (Paudel,2004:14). For the sake of revenge, she joined the movement. Low success in school leaving certificate examination and lack of training options for engaging students failing their school level examination is another main factor for their joining the Maoist movement in order to escape idleness and frustration (Karki and Bhattarai 2003:5)

Apart from that, propaganda of women's liberation, equality in the Maoists organization in opportunity, in award and promotion, the hope of all kinds of emancipation, and on-going women related social reform programmes like anti-alcohol, anti-gambling campaigns, anti-sexual violence programmes, anti-women exploitation programmes are the main attractions for women participate and support the movement. Some are there only for "romance, pleasure, and luxury". But, there is a consensus that the credit has

to be given to the Maoists for "widespread women's awareness in the Nepalese history" (Mulyankan, August-September 2004: 13).

Slogans about 'progressive education' rather than 'bourgeois education' and love/ courtship is also a vital factor for women's attraction. Orthodox social system towards the widow is another cause for compelling women to join. In Nepal, generally, girls are not allowed to choose their own partners and to decide her marriage; still the society does not tolerate love marriage easily. If the love affair is inter-caste, acceptance is difficult by both, the parents and the society. Increment of Widow population and the unchanged social perception on widow marriage seems another factor, which led women to join the movement. After Maoist movement, 15,000 people are killed; most of them are male leaving behind young widows in the society. However, the society does not accept a widow-marriage easily. In a patriarchal society in Nepal, if people are involved in these activities, a female have to face social degradation in comparison to their male counterparts. In such a situation, the Maoist movement became accommodative to socially mistreated women. It is said that a majority of women in the movement are "influenced by superficial factors (*Bhool Bhulaiya*) than deep knowledge and understanding of state affairs, political process, gender exploitation, women rights etc" (Adhikari 2006, an unpublished paper). Denying these factors, Hisila Yami, a senior woman Maoists leader said that the women are not recruited for party's "contemporary advantages" but hired because of "their double resistance capacity than man" (Mulyankan, August-September, 2004: 12-18).

To sum up the social reality, which promoted women to join the Maoists movement, we can agree with the argument made by a political scientist Kapil shrestha. He argues, "after democracy in 1990 some positive changes towards women participation in politics has appeared, but sociologically speaking most of the Nepalese women politicians belong to 'the small upper strata of urban, middle class, upper caste and educated elite background not from the rural, grassroots or low caste background" (Shrestha 2001).

Comparison

We can compare both struggles on the basis of its objectives, goals and achievements. Apart from that, the paper tried to examine validities and reliabilities by observing available narratives, and data of both the movement. First, the Telengana movement was declared against the Nizam's oppression. The Telengana struggle supported to abolish the Nizam feudalism from Telengana. It seemed that the Telengana struggle was more focused on democracy and freedom. However, the Maoist Movement in Nepal has been launched after the restoration of democracy in 1990, which provisioned, at least, freedom to the people. Abolishing the monarchy and establishing the

"Democratic Republic" were the said specific objectives of the Maoists of Nepal.

Second, the Telengana movement had supported the independent struggle of India from British colony. If such a disturbance had not occurred in several parts of India, Britain could have taken the independent struggle at face value and they could have tried to use more force against the struggle. People were able to raise slogan against the feudal and brutal regime and able to abolish not only local principality but also it's backbone--the colonial power. Ultimately, the Nizam principality was abolished after the departure of the British from India.

Although the Maoists have shown their eagerness to join the "competitive democracy" and signed different agreements (12-point agreements in November 2005 and Eight points agreements in June 2005) with seven party alliance (SPA), their earlier targets were SPA cadres in the villages undermining democracy. The Maoists killed, injured and compelled people to leave the village, who were believed to be at least progressive than any feudal regimes. The SPA cadres were not only tortured but also banned from launching political activities in the Maoists-influenced-areas. Apart from such 'undemocratic' behaviours against the democratic forces, the Maoists claimed that they had a "tacit understanding" with King Birendra. These activities of the Maoists compelled the people to be skeptical. The doubt of the people was 'the objectives of the Maoists movement was not to strengthen the freedom and democracy but to support the undemocratic and feudal regime'. The suspicion of the people over the Maoists was obvious because the monarchy itself has been considered as "the main obstacle for strengthening the democracy in Nepal".

The doubt of the people over the Maoists increased, when both Maoists and the king trapped democratic forces or parliamentary parties, in Nepal. On the one hand, as mentioned earlier, the Maoists banned the movements of the parliamentary parties in the countryside, which made the government unable for holding of the parliamentary and local elections. On the other, the king started ruling the country blaming the democratic government for its' 'incompetence' to holding the election and for maintaining the peace and security in the country. It is said that the democratic process was initially disturbed by rampant violent activities of the Maoists; even the democratically elected government was triggered to impose the state of emergency and termed the Maoists as 'terrorists'. The Maoist activities became major 'trump card' for the king to be used in asking support for his autocratic regime.

As a consequence more than forty thousand women's representation in different democratic agencies was directly hit antagonizing them. However, the Maoists defended such antagonism as the initial compulsion when they were weak. Prachanda, in an interview defended it and said such strategy was

there only for "extended political disclose to establish the ideology and to preserve the power when the party was overall weak in ideology, politics, organization and physical power". Now, according to him, they are trying to bring all possible force together because they are now " strong and reached near the strategic aim" (Prachanda in *Janadesh* 2006: 15-16).

Third, both the struggles, the Maoist movement and Telengana movement have definitely empowered women, sometimes knowingly and sometimes unknowingly. Although the Telangana struggle was called off without success, it has has brought some qualitative changes in women and in their life. After 40 years of the unsuccessful struggle, women still have no guilty feeling for the struggle but they took pride on it. Somaka of Vimpati who participated in Telangana struggle says, "in those days, could we sit and talk to you like this? Today we can do that. If we dressed up well, if we put kumkum they used to say, what does she think herself?" (Sangathana 1989: 16). For her, that sort of empowerment was gained by the struggle, although the entire problems were not solved. Another woman participant Kausila was also satisfied by the achieved things. She says, "we didn't know what was behind this wall. We could never go out. Now we go out and look to our agricultural works (Ibid: 16)."

One question may be raised about how the women are empowered by the Maoist's movement. Some direct and indirect factors created by the movement, however, have led the women to be empowered. The Maoists' conflict compelled majority of the male members to leave their home into urban area or escape to the jungle to join the Maoist guerrilla force. Women have thus been 'compelled to take the responsibility of running households. They have compulsion to go and take part to express their opinion in front of mass and so on. Women were compelled even to plough the field to feed their family members, which was restricted earlier. Engaging more in the public life than ever before, they have become more vocal in community activities.

On the other hand, the active involvement of women in both political and military organizations of the Maoist party has boosted the confidence of the Nepali women as a whole. This has indeed produced a wide-ranging impact on the Nepali state. Now, the government itself has started to recruit women into the Royal Nepal Army. The parliamentary forces also have realized the need to launch more progressive and reformist programmes to increase the role of women in the political participation.

Taking all these factors into consideration, we can conclude that women were sensitized and made aware about their role in the society. On the other hand, they are affected badly by the ongoing conflict. Women have become double victim due to the People's War. First, they are the direct victims of the security force as they are participants, relatives, wives, daughters and mothers of the rebels. They are continuously threatened, tortured and harassed in the

name of inquiry as well as raped, killed, and disappeared as suspects, rebellion and also relatives of rebels. Second, the Maoists also demand lodging, food, money and sex from women any time and any day. Rapes by the Maoists have been frequently reported in the press and field work reports, conducted by individual visitors and human rights groups. The Maoists are also following the security forces' footstep to torture people suspecting them as informers, opponents and class enemies. Third, women are compelled to bear the double burden because of absence of their male members who are either killed or are compelled to flee from their domicile.

Although, the Maoist claims itself as a radical party but it is also not far from being feudal towards the issue of women. Only two women members— Hisila Yami and Pampha Bhusal– are among the 27 Politburo members. The same women members of the Politburo are also in the 39 -member Central Committee. In the case of female leaders, only two women–Pampha Bhusal and Hisila Yami–among the 40% women representation in the Maoist movement– have represented in politburo and central level. In the military wing, there is no single woman in the division commander where most decisions are made. But We have to say that the issue of gender is highlighted and sensitized in the Nepali society.

After having a look on Latchampas elaboration, we can conclude that the women in Telangana struggle faced same problem whatever Nepali women are facing now; the fear of rape and sexual harassment, torture etc. They kept secrets and protected other party workers especially the male by facing all the troubles of the state security[5]. But they blamed the party for not being able to evolve any policy regarding the women. The charges over the party by women is not only about its policy towards women in the organization, their main grievances are that the party initially appreciated and welcomed women's support in the movement by wooing, and later it distressed them in the way without any alternatives. Some of them left their husbands, kids and home in the name of 'emancipation', but they got nothing but more trouble. Reminding Party's promise to women thwarted their involvement in the struggle, Mallu Swaraj, who commanded a guerrilla squad and was a legend in the Telangana, says:

> In the party, they will see only what the movement needs … So when struggle was withdrawn they told us to go and marry…we fought with them. We said that even if the forms of struggle had changed we should be given some work (Sangathana 1989: 271-272).

But when the movement was called off, the party had not fulfilled its promise by giving work to women. They themselves, who spent their whole active life in the movement, often felt suppressed when the party withdrew the struggle and asked the women to go back and marry. Women are mentally tortured by

such an immature decision of party. Priyamvada who spent years in the struggle said that "she often felt like committing suicide"(Sangathana 1989:272)." Sugunamma's observation is an example how they got frustrated after party's order to women "go back and marry". She says:

> They have used us so long and now they say go stay at home. How could they even understand what the situation was at home? What mental torture–I was really upset. That was my first taste of suffering (ibid).

Kamalama and Salama are the examples of exploitation by the party where Kamalama, now, is begging in her village to feed her children and is carrying "liquor and worked as a wage labor to bring up her sons" (Ibid). They themselves are in doubt whether they got some achievements or not because, according to Pesara Sattemma (Sangathana 1989: 221-227), the struggle's initial aim was for land ownership and against the Vetti. Vetti was abolished but women were not successful in getting land on their own name. Women considered that situation as big blow and insult to them. Priyambada, another women participant in the struggle, explained struggle as failed action to address the agenda of women. She says, "after the parliamentary election and police action, these dreams were–smashed-crushed like an egg. What a blow it was, after the elections, do we know where we were? Like a proverbial rug …lying exactly where it was through" (Sangathana 1989) Ultimately, when the movement was ended, women neither got land, nor enjoyed other sort of settlement. The slogan 'all sorts of emancipation' remained a fantasy.

Everyone who knows the situation of women after calling off the Telengana struggle has always raised the question, fearing whether the Maoist movement will also go the same way as that of Telengana struggle? The fear is real because there were no women participation at the decision-making level in Telengana movement. The condition remains the same in the Maoists movement because only two women members–Hisila Yami and Pampha Bhusal– were among the 27 Politburo members. No women are there in standing committee, which is the supreme body of the party. And, only three (two representing in politburo also, and another was Uma Bhujel) members are in the 39 - Member Central Committee. Now, the Maoist party has dissolved the standing committee and the politburo; all the power has been centralized, which according to them, is because of their forth-coming general convention. In the military wing, there is only a single woman, Sapana is the company commander where they claim 40-50 per cent women's are working under them. The party and its women are still eager to raise the agenda of women participation in all the sectors.

After the *Janaandolan* II (Peoples' movement), the reinstated parliament has unanimously provisioned 33 per cent reservation to women in Nepal. The concern of the people is how this decision of the parliament would be

implemented. The decision of 33 per cent reservation to the women seems unique and progressive in South Asia. People are having a doubt over its' implementation because of the traditional thinking of all the political forces over women in Nepal; till date, every party has offered the opportunities to the women for fulfilling the quotas. Recently after the Janaandolan II also, the position of the parties on the issues of women remained unchanged. Only a state ministerial portfolio has been given to the women; neither the Maoists nor the SPA sent any women in their dialogue teams, and in the interim constitution drafting committee.

After reading the narratives of the participants of the Telengana struggle, the research has concluded that radical agendas would be harmful for society, if the agendas were raised just to woo the people. It will not only be harmful to the organizer, but also to the individual or participants making them frustrated. Such frustration may possibly direct another revolt. The Telangana movement should be taken as a guide in which the CPI called off the movement in 1951 but the party was not able to control its' activists to join another revolt. Those who were not satisfied by both, the achievement and the party's decision to end the struggle, tried to reorganize such a struggle. After being unable to resume revolt by the same party, they tried to form an alternate party. Ultimately, in 1964, the split took place in the CPI and CPI (M) was created in the initiation of those dissatisfied members, which again continued armed struggle against the Andhra rulers in 1969 demanding "separate Telangana state" (Mohanty 2005: 11-15). So, one can conclude that if some one takes weapon, s(he) rarely will quit the weapons before reaching to his target. Experiences show that all revolutionary parties and their accountable leaders can analyze the entire situation and decide to compromise by suspending and even giving up the armed struggle but applying such theory in cadres and followers, who took weapons after suppressed and marginalized feeling, has not succeed properly. For them, 'do continue the revolt and die in the battle field' is better than being back before getting something. The leader of the Maoists must think to prevent such possibility, and hopefully that may be the signal of thinking over it by the Maoists supreme commander when he realized that "whatever has supported for successful development of the people's war, it is the both, main possibility and main threat."

It is the desperate need of time to Nepali Maoists leaders to think and rethink about the hindrances those hindrances felt long before by Priyamvada, Sugunamma, Kamalama and Sattemma, and that group which split and re-organized the revolt after the wind up of the Telengana people's struggle. Every top-level leaders of the groups including the Maoists, which raised the radical agendas, must learn lesson from Telengana before they take any step forward.

Notes

1. The biggest owners of land who claimed and enjoyed proprietarily rights over the peasants.
2. See *Space Times*, May 27, 2003
3. For detail see Times special.nepali times.com/issue268/ceasefire-roundup-1htp
4. They are the students of Rolpa district they were taken to the army camp and then their name was in the list of *Krantikari* student wing. They were threatened by the army that there was possibility to kill them then they freed but were required to report the army camp at two or three days interval (see Karki and Bhattarai, 2003)
5. She says, 'my husband was scared, but I did not listen to him. I joined the Sangham. After all what could we do alone? Amin was terror. He used to make the men run on their knees. One women was raped. Many were raped. In fact we used to stay together and escape together-pretend that an old women was dead, someone had delivered a baby or a girl had matured. We never revealed to the police or Razakar the where about the sangham' (cited in Sanghatana, 1989: 16).

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फत्तेपुर, सप्तरीका मुसहरहरू : सामाजिक र आर्थिक परिवेश तथा समावेशीकरणको मुद्दा

नानीराम खत्री

पृष्ठभूमि

तराईको सप्तरी जिल्ला, फत्तेपुर गा.वि.स.मा बसोबास गर्ने मुसहरहरूको सामाजिक र आर्थिक परिवेश तथा समावेशीकरणको मुद्दा अन्तर्गत मूलतः जातीय पहिचान, उत्पत्ति र इतिहास, सामाजिक स्वरूप र संगठन, धार्मिक विश्वास, चाडपर्व र संस्कारहरू, सांस्कृतिक परम्परा र आधुनिकीकरणको प्रभाव, जातीय प्रविधि र अर्थतन्त्रका विशेषताहरूका साथै राष्ट्रिय मूल प्रवाहमा समाविष्ट हुन नसक्नुका कारकतत्त्वहरू, त्यसका लागि सरकारद्वारा प्रत्याभूत गरिनुपर्ने नीति तथा कार्यक्रमहरू बारे प्रकाश पार्ने प्रयत्न यस लेखमा गरिएको छ ।

हिन्दू वर्णाश्रम व्यवस्थामा दलितहरूलाई शूद्र वर्गमा राखिएको र अछूत मानिएको छ । दलित आयोगको बुलेटिन (२०६०) ले मुसहरहरूलाई तराईका दलित जातमध्ये एकमा गणना गरेको छ । तदनुरूप यहाँ जातीय सिद्धान्तले उब्जाएका विभेदका सम्बन्धमा विद्वान्‌हरूका व्याख्या तथा विश्लेषणहरूलाई उल्लेख गर्नु सान्दर्भिक हुन आउँछ ।

जात एक सामाजिक एकाई हो जसलाई हिन्दु समाजमा वंशज, विवाह र पेशाको आधारमा वर्गीकरण गरेको पाइन्छ । जातका सन्दर्भमा विभिन्न विद्वान्‌हरूले विभिन्न प्रकारले व्याख्या गरेका छन् :

डचुमो (Dumont 1980) ले हिन्दुहरूमा 'जात' को अवधारणा कम्तिमा पनि दुई हजार वर्षदेखि विद्यमान रहँदै आएको कुरा उल्लेख गरेका छन् । डचुमोले आफ्नो कृतिमा 'जात' को जटिल सिद्धान्त र ती सिद्धान्तहरूको प्रचलनको विषयमा विस्तृत रूपले व्याख्या गर्दै जात प्रणालीलाई सम्पूर्ण रूपमा एक धार्मिक र नैतिक प्रणालीका सम्बन्धको उपजको रूपमा विश्लेषण गरेका छन् ।

घुरे (Ghurye, 2000) का विचारमा जात भनेको 'भारतीय आर्य संस्कृति अन्तर्गतको ब्राह्मनिक (Brahmenic) शिशु हो जो गंगाको झोलुङ्गे (भूमि) मा हुर्किएर सम्पूर्ण भारतमा फैलियो ।' उनका अनुसार पहिले आर्य र शूद्रका बीच जुन विभेद थियो त्यो अहिले आएर द्विज र शूद्रमा परिणत भई हिन्दू समाजमा चोखो (शुद्ध) र विटुलो (अशुद्ध) बीचको विभेद बढ्दै गएको कुराको चर्चा गरेका छन् ।

श्रीनिवास (Srinivas, 1962) ले जातलाई धर्म र राजनीतिको सन्दर्भमा जोडेर व्याख्या गरेका छन् । उनले जातको व्याख्या गर्दा दुइटा अवधारणालाई मुख्य रूपले उजागर गरेको पाइन्छ । ती हुन्- प्रवल जात (Dominant Caste) र सांस्कृतीकरण (Sankritization) ।

स्मिथ (Smith, 1986) ले जातका तीन वटा मुख्य विशेषता (Characteristics) बारे उल्लेख गरेको पाइन्छ । ती तीन विशेषताहरू- (१) तह तह परेको वर्गीकरण

(Hierarchy), (२) आर्थिक परनिर्भरता (Economic Interdependence) (३) चोखो/पवित्र/शुद्ध (Pure) र विटुलो/अशुद्ध (Impure) को अवधारणा अनुरूप हिन्दू समाजमा गरिएको विभाजन र विभेद । उनका अनुसार चोखो वा शुद्ध वर्ग माथिल्लो तहका भएकाले विटुलो वा अशुद्ध वर्गमा राखिएकाहरू चोखाहरूबाट अलग रहनु पर्ने र उनीहरूमा आश्रित रहनुपर्ने प्रचलन रहेको कुरा उल्लेख गरेका छन् ।

वि.सं. २०२० को मुलुकी ऐनले नेपालमा छुवाछुत प्रथा उन्मूलन गरेको भएता पनि व्यवहारमा उन्मूलन भएको छैन । माथिल्लो जातसँग दलितहरूको पानी, भातभान्सा र विहावारी वर्जित छ ।

सन् १९९१ ई.को जनगणनादेखि नै मुसहरहरूलाई तराईका दलितहरूमध्ये एकमा समावेश गरिएकाले यस सन्दर्भमा छोटकरीमा चर्चा गर्नु उपयुक्त देखिन्छ । दलित भित्र कुन कुन जातिहरू पर्दछन् भन्ने कुरामा केही विवाद भए पनि सन् १९९१ को जनगणनाले दलित भित्र पर्ने जातिहरूमध्ये वादी, गाइने, कामी, सार्की, दमाई, खत्वे, लोहार, दुसाध, मुसहर र चमार गरी १० दलित जातिहरू र उनीहरूको कुल जनसंख्या २,२०१७८१ (११.९%) उल्लेख गरेको छ । त्यस्तै सन् २००१ को जनगणनाले दलितभित्र पर्ने जातिहरूमा वादी, गाइने, कामी, सार्की, दमाई, वाँतर, धोबी, दुसाध, खत्वे, मुसहर, पासवान, चिडिमार, तत्मा, चमार, डुस र हलखोर गरी १६ थरीका दलितहरूको कुल जनसंख्या २,६७५,८१७ (११.६०%) जनाएको छ । दलित आयोगको बुलेटिन (२०६२) ले नेपालमा पहाडे र तराई दलित गरी २८ थरीका दलितहरू रहेको तथ्यांक प्रस्तुत गरेता पनि सन् २००१ को जनगणनाले चाहिँ १६ थरीका दलितहरूको तथ्यांक प्रस्तुत गरेको छ । तीमध्ये तराईका ११ थरी दलितहरू वाँतर, धोबी, दुसाध, खत्वे, चिडिमार, तत्मा/तांती, मुसहर, चमार, पासवान, डोम र हलखोर परेका छन् । तराईमा दलितहरूको जनसंख्या १९९१ को २६.४% बाट २००१ मा ३७.३% हुन आएको छ । सन् २००१ मा थप पाँच थरी दलितहरू (वाँतर, तत्मा, चिडिमार, डोम र हलखोर) को पहिचान भएको थियो । तराईका दलितहरूमध्ये जनसंख्याका हिसाबले चमार पहिलो स्थानमा र मुसहर दोश्रो स्थानमा छन् । अर्थात् सबभन्दा बढी जनसंख्या चमारहरूको छ भने त्यसपछिको जनसंख्या मुसहरहरूको छ । यस अध्ययनको केन्द्रविन्दु मुसहरहरू भएका हुनाले नेपालमा उनीहरूको जनसांख्यिक विवरण, वसोवास र विस्तार आदि बारे उल्लेख गर्नु सान्दर्भिक देखिन्छ ।

मुसहरहरूको कुल जनसंख्या सन् १९९१ मा १,४१,९८० रहेकोमा २००१ मा १,७२,४३४ हुन पुग्यो । जसमा वृद्धिसंख्या ३०४५४ (२१.४%) छ । १९९१ मा १६ जिल्लाहरूमा मुख्य रूपमा वसोबास गर्ने मुसहरहरू सन् २००१ को जनगणनासम्मको एक दशकको अन्तरालमा आइपुग्दा ४० जिल्लाहरूमा फैलिएका भए तार्पानि झापा, मोरङ्ग, सुनसरी, उदयपुर, सप्तरी, सिराहा, सर्लाही, धनुषा, महोत्तरी, रौतहट, सिन्धुली, वारा, नवलपरासी, रूपन्देही, पर्सा गरी १५ जिल्लाहरूमा उल्लेख्य रूपमा वसोबास गरेको देखिन्छ ।

अध्ययन क्षेत्र सप्तरी जिल्लामा सन् १९९१ मा मुसहरहरूको जनसंख्या २२९३५ (४.९२%) रहेको थियो भने सन् २००१ मा २९७३६ (५.२१%) रहेको छ । यस जिल्लाका दलितहरूमध्ये मुसहरको जनसंख्या सबैभन्दा बढी रहेको छ ।

त्यस्तै गरेर प्रस्तुत अध्ययन क्षेत्र, फत्तेपुर गा.वि.स. मा २००१ को जनगणना अनुसार मुसहरहरूको जनसंख्या ६४६ (६.३४%) रहेको छ । यस गा.वि.स.मा पनि दलितहरूमध्ये मुसहरको जनसंख्या सबैभन्दा बढी रहेको छ ।

तराईका दलितहरू मध्ये दोश्रो स्थानमा रहेका मुसहरहरू सामाजिक र आर्थिक रूपले अत्यन्त पिछडिएका छन् । मुसहर समाज आफ्नै परम्परागत मौलिक संस्कृतिले भरिपूर्ण भएता पनि मुसहर सम्बन्धी अध्ययन ज्यादै न्यून छन् । जे जति अध्ययन भएका छन् ती पनि तराईमा बसोवास गर्ने जाति/जनजातिहरूका बारेमा भएका अध्ययनहरूमा नै सीमित रहेका छन् । त्यसमा मुख्य गरी गेज (१९७५) ले पहाडीमूलका र तराईका बासिन्दाहरू बीच एकअर्कालाई बुझ्ने कुरामा खाडल रहेको हुनाले राष्ट्रिय एकीकरणमा वाधा उत्पन्न भएको निष्कर्ष निकालेका छन् । रजौरे (१९९७) ले दाङ्गका थारुहरूको विस्तृत सामाजिक-आर्थिक विश्लेषण गरेका छन् । झा (१९९३) ले नेपालमा तराई समुदाय र राष्ट्रिय एकीकरण विषयमा अध्ययन गरेका छन् । वर्घार्ट (१९९६) ले जनकपुरको मिथिला संस्कृति सम्बन्धमा विस्तृत अध्ययन गरेका छन् । मुसहरहरू बारे अध्ययनहरू भने हुँदै नभएका चाहिँ होइनन् । दाहाल (१९७८) ले पूर्वी तराईका भारतीय आप्रवासीहरूको अध्ययनका क्रममा मुसहरहरू बारे संक्षिप्त चर्चा गरेका छन् । त्यस्तै थोमस कक्स (१९९४) ले बादीहरूको अध्ययन गर्ने क्रममा मुसहरहरूबारे संक्षिप्त चर्चा गरेका छन् । दाहाल र क्षेत्री (२०५३) ले पूर्वी तराईका ६ जिल्लाहरूका मुसहरहरूको सामाजिक-आर्थिक अवस्था बारे अध्ययन गरेका छन् । गौतम (२०४५) ले मुसहरहरूको सामाजिक परम्परा बारे एक लेख प्रकाशित गरेका छन् । त्यस्तै गरेर समाजशास्त्र/मानवशास्त्रका विद्यार्थीहरूले एम.ए. शोधपत्र लेखनको क्रममा मुसहरहरूबारे केही अध्ययनहरू गरेका छन् । दवाडी (२०५१) ले सुनसरी वकलौरी गा.वि.स. का मुसहरहरूको सामाजिक-आर्थिक अवस्था, अर्याल (१९९७) ले गमनगर मिचैयाका मुसहरहरूको सामाजिक-आर्थिक अवस्था, पोखेल (१९९७) ले मोरङ्ग जिल्ला खाजी कोभराका मुसहरहरूको सामाजिक आर्थिक अवस्था, कर्माचार्य (१९९९) ले सुन्दापुर गा.वि.स. उदयपुर जिल्लाका मुसहरहरू, दुलाल (२०५८) ले डाँगीहाट गा.वि.स. र वाहुनी गा.वि.स. मोरङ्गका मुसहरहरूको सामाजिक-आर्थिक अवस्था, मण्डल (२००१) ले सप्तरी जिल्लाका मुसहरहरूको सामाजिक-आर्थिक अवस्था बारे अध्ययन गरेका छन् । तैपनि यी सबै अध्ययनहरू अप्रकाशित रहनुका साथै सामाजिक-आर्थिक अवस्थाको प्रस्तुतीकरण र विश्लेषणमा मात्र केन्द्रीत छन् । मुसहरहरूको राष्ट्रिय मूलप्रवाहमा समावेशका दृष्टिकोणबाट भने हालसम्म कुनै अध्ययन भएको छैन ।

इतिहासका विभिन्न कालखण्डमा नेपाल प्रवेश गरेका मुसहरहरूले तराईको जंगल फँडानी गरी "रस्ती रसाउने वस्ती वसाउने" कार्यको शुभारम्भका साथै जमिन्दारहरूका भूमि (कामत) मा रही कृषि श्रमको आपूर्ति गर्ने कार्यमा जुन

योगदान गरेका छन्, त्यो अतुलनीय छ । तैपनि तराईका अधिकांश मुसहरहरू भूमिहीन हुनु, घरबास नहुनु, नागरिकताबाट वञ्चित रहनु अत्यन्त दुःखलाग्दो कुरा भएकाले उनीहरूलाई राष्ट्रिय मूलधारमा समाविष्ट गर्न उनीहरूका सामाजिक, आर्थिक अवस्था बारे अध्ययन अनुसन्धान हुनु नितान्त आवश्यक छ । साथै तराईका धेरैजसो गा.वि.स.हरू जनसंख्या वृद्धिका कारणले दिनानुदिन नगरीकरणतर्फ उन्मुख छन् । यस्ता परिवर्तनले तराईमा बस्ने पिछडिएका जात जाति वा दलितहरूलाई कस्तो प्रभाव परेको छ ? भन्ने कुरा थाहा पाउन सकिएको छैन । अध्ययन क्षेत्र फत्तेपुर जमिन्दारहरूको प्रिययलो थियो । हाल आएर यो गा.वि.स. विद्यालय, हेल्थपोष्ट, विजुली, टेलिफोन, यातायात र बजारको सुविधाले गर्दा नगरीकरणतर्फ उन्मुख छ । यसर्थ फत्तेपुर, सप्तरीमा बसोबास गर्ने मुसहरहरू पनि यस्ता प्रभावबाट प्रभावित भएकाले उनीहरूको सामाजिक, आर्थिक परिवेश र मूल प्रवाहमा समावेश बारे यो लेख केन्द्रित छ ।

सामाजिक परिवेश
मुसहर जातीय पहिचान, उत्पत्ति र ऐतिहासिक पृष्ठभूमिः मुसहरहरू को हुन् ? भन्ने बारे विद्वान्हरूले आ-आफ्नै धारणाहरू राखेका छन् । क्रुकका अनुसार मुसहरहरू द्रविड हुन् (क्रुक, १८८७: १२) । घुरिये (१९६१) ले मुसहरहरूका शारीरिक विशेषताहरू प्राग-द्रविड प्रकार (Pre Dravida Type) सँग मिल्दोजुल्दो भएकाले उनीहरूलाई प्राग-द्रविड प्रजाति (Pre Dravida Race) अन्तर्गत समाविष्ट गर्न जोड दिएका छन् (घुरिये, १९६१: १२७) । रविन्द्रनाथ मुकर्जी (१९९२) ले रजवार र मुसहर दुवै प्रजातीय दृष्टिकोणले श्याम प्रजातीय तत्वसँग सम्बन्धित छन् तर यो प्रजातीय तत्व कस्तो छ? त्यसबारे मतभेद छ भन्दछन् (मुकर्जी, १९९२: ४७३) । दाहालले मुसहर शूद्र वर्णभित्र पर्ने एक जाति हो; नेपाली आर्य समाजभित्र यिनीहरूले छोएको भान्सा पानी चल्दैन र यो जाति आर्यहरूले कामको आधारमा वर्गीकरण गरेको वर्ण व्यवस्थाभित्र अनार्य वा 'दस्यू' बाट शूद्र वर्णमा भित्रिएको हुनु पर्दछ भन्ने कुरामा जोड दिएका छन् (दाहाल, २०५३ : १६) । डोर बहादुर विष्टकाअनुसार भारतमा पाइने चराचुरुङ्गी मारी खाने घुमन्ते जातिको एक शाखाको रूपमा विकसित र विस्तारित भएको यो जाति नेपालमा कृषि मजदुरी गरेर जीवन निर्वाह गर्ने खत्वे जातिको रूपमा चिनिन्छ । यो जाति अन्य जातिको विवाहमा डोली बोक्ने र माटोको काम गर्ने सिपालु मानिन्छ (विष्ट, १९७६: ११३) । डिल्लीराम दाहाल चाहिँ मुसहर जातिलाई तराईका खत्वे, चमार, दुसाध, बाँतर र डोम जस्तै छुन नहुने तल्लो वर्गको हिन्दू जाति मान्दछन् (दाहाल, १९७८: ११३) । श्रीकान्त शर्माले मुसहरहरूलाई मिथिलाका शतशुद्रक जातिभित्र पर्ने अछुत जातिको पंक्तिमा राखेका छन् (शर्मा, १९५३: १८) ।

नेसफिल्ड (१८८५) ले मुसहरहरूलाई मुसेरा (Mushera) लेखेका छन् । मुसेरा (Mushera) शब्दले सामान्य रूपमा मुसा समात्ने (Rat catcher), भन्ने अर्थ लाग्दछ । तर Rat-catcher र Rat eater भन्नु गलत अर्थ लाग्दछ किनकि यो नै उनीहरूको

स्थायी विशेषता होइन (क्रुक, १८८७: १२–२७) । रिजले (१८९१: ११३) ले भारतीय मुसहरहरू छोटा नागपुरका भूइयाँ जनजातिकै एक हाँगा (Offshoot) हुन् भन्ने कुरा बताएका छन् । कसै कसैले मुसहर शब्दले (मासु+ हेरा)= मुसेरा (मासु हेर्ने, शिकारी) भन्ने अर्थ लाग्दछ भनेका छन् । रिजले (१८९१: ११३) भने मुसा+ हर = "मुसहर" शब्दको अर्थ मुसा समात्ने र मुसा खाने भन्ने मान्दछन् ।

नेपालको सन्दर्भमा मुसहर जाति माटो खन्ने, स्वतन्त्र मजदुरी गर्ने, अरूको घरमा हरूवा, चरूवा बस्ने, जमिन्दारहरू कहाँ श्रम गर्ने, मुसा समात्ने र खाने (Rat traper/eater) जातिको रूपमा परिचित छन् । अहिले पनि मुसहरहरू धान काटिसकेको खेतमा गएर मुसाको दुलो खनेर मुसाले थुपारेको धान वटुल्ने, मुसा मार्ने र खाने कार्य गर्दछन् ।

नेपालका मुसहरहरूले आफूलाई सदा, ऋषभदेव, माझी, मण्डल भन्न रुचाउँछन् । अध्ययन क्षेत्रमा तिरहुतिया थरका मुसहरहरूको वाहुल्यता रहेको पाइयो । तिरहुतिया (तिरहुत स्थान विशेषबाट नाम रहन गएको) थरका मुसहरहरू आफूलाई सबभन्दा उच्च ठान्दछन् र अन्य थरका मुसहरहरूलाई तल्लो स्तरका ठान्दछन् । तिरहुतिया थरका मुसहरहरूले अन्य थरका मुसहरहरूले छोएको खदैनन् । तिरहुतिया थर हुने मुसहरहरू भित्रै कुलदेवता फरक हुने मध्ये विहेवारी चल्दछ ।

मुसहरहरूको शारीरिक आकृति हेर्दा तराई क्षेत्रमा थारू, खत्वे, केवट, माली आदिसँग मिल्दोजुल्दो देखिन्छ । मुसहरहरूको शारीरिक आकृति श्याम वर्ण, बाक्लो ओठ, सानो साँगुरो निधार, ठूलो थेप्चिएको नाक, चहकिला ठूला आँखा भएको हुन्छ ।

जनकपुर पूर्वका मुसहरहरू मैथिली र त्यहाँका थारू भाषा बोल्दछन् भने जनकपुर पश्चिमकाले भोजपुरी तथा यस क्षेत्रको थारू भाषा बोल्दछन् । अध्ययन क्षेत्रका मुसहरहरू ठेठी मैथिली (थारू भाषा र मैथिली भाषा मिश्रित) भाषा बोल्दछन् । मुसहर पुरुष तथा महिला नेपाली भाषा बोल्नेहरूसँग पनि ठेठी मैथिली भाषा बोल्दछन् । नेपाली र हिन्दी थोरैले मात्र बुझ्दछन् ।

मुसहरहरूको उत्पत्तिको सन्दर्भमा विभिन्न लोककथाहरू (legends) प्रचलित छन्:

प्रमुख सूचनादाता मडर मलरु सदाले मुसहरहरूको उत्पत्तिको कथा यसरी बताउँछन् "सर्वप्रथम परमेश्वरबाट सबै जातिको पहिलो मानवको सृजना भयो । परमेश्वरबाट सृजना भएका हरेक मानवलाई चढनको निमित्त घोडा र काम गर्नको निमित्त यन्त्र (tool) दिइयो । मुसहर बाहेक अरूले यन्त्र र घोडा लिए र घोडा चढेर गए । मुसहरहरूले चाहिँ पाइतला राख्नको निमित्त घोडाको पेटमा एक जोडी प्वाल पारे । यस्तो मूर्खतापूर्ण कार्य देखेर परमेश्वरले उनीहरूलाई पृथ्वीमा खनेर मुसा निकाल्ने र मुसामा नै निर्भर रहन आदेश दिए । जब परमेश्वरले खाद्यान्न रित्याए मुसहरहरूले टपरी चाट्न थाले । त्यो देखेर परमेश्वरले मुसहरहरूलाई तल्लो दर्जामा झारे र सदैव टपरी चाट्न परोस् भन्ने श्राप दिए । त्यसैले मुसहरहरूलाई तल्लो दर्जामा झारियो । यसैले मुसहरहरूमा घोडा निषेधित (taboo) प्राणी मानिन्छ ।" यो

लोककथा भारतीय मुसहरहरूको सन्दर्भमा रिजले (१८९१ः १२३) ले उल्लेख गरेको लोककथासँग मिल्दोजुल्दो देखिन्छ ।

जनश्रुतिअनुसार नेपालका मुसहरहरू आफूहरू रामायणका रचयिता वाल्मिकी ऋषिका सन्तति भएको ठान्दछन् (श्रेष्ठ र प्रधान १९७५; गौतम र थापा मगर १९९४) ।

फत्तेपुरका मुसहरहरू आफ्ना पुर्खाहरूको उत्पत्तिको कथा सभर जनजाति, शैनी र शुकल ऋषि अनि दिना र भद्री जस्ता कुलदेवतासँग जोड्दछन् ।

पहिलो किंवदन्तीअनुसार "मुसहरहरूका पुर्खाहरूको उत्पत्ति भिल्ल जनजातिबाट भएको हो । राजा भिल्लका सन्तान सवरी मुसहनी (भिल्लिनी) का घरमा रामचन्द्र र लक्ष्मण वनवासको लागि प्रस्थान गर्ने क्रममा आइपुगे । भिर्लिनी साह्रै गरीब भएका कारण घरमा आएका पाहुनाको सत्कारका निमित्त नजिकको वयरको रुखबाट बयर टिपी ल्याएर सत्कार गर्न खोज्दा बयर काँचो देखा परेको हुनाले गुलियो छ कि छैन भनी हेर्न चाख्दै राख्दै गर्दा बयर जुठो हुन गएको र त्यही जुठो बयर रामचन्द्रले खाएको कुरा रामायणमा उल्लेख भएकोले मुसहरहरूको उत्पत्ति रामायणकाल भन्दा अगाडिदेखि नै अस्तित्वमा आएको हुनु पर्दछ भन्ने बताउँदछन् ।" यो कथा नेसफिल्ड (१८८५) ले उल्लेख गरेको भारतीय मुसहरहरूको पुर्खाको कथा सभर जनजातिसँग मिल्दोजुल्दो छ । त्यस्तै गरेर पासवान (२०५३) ले उल्लेख गरेको राजा भिल्लका सन्तान मुसहर जातिसँग पनि मिल्दोजुल्दो छ ।

दोश्रो किवदन्ती भने शैनी र सुकल नाम गरेका ऋषिसँग जोडिएको छ । मुसहर जातिमा शैनी र सुकल नाम गरेका दुइ ऋषिहरू थिए । उनीहरूले आफ्ना जातिलाई अगाडि बढाउने क्रममा उनीहरूका रहन सहन र खानपानमा सुधार ल्याउने प्रयत्नस्वरूप शाकाहारी भोजन गर्न र सफासुघर रहन उपदेश दिँदै हिँडेका थिए । तर मुसहरहरू भने झन् झन् माँसाहारी भोजन गर्न लागे । यसमा पनि माछा, गगंटा, घुँघी (शंखे कीरा) र मुसो बढी मन पराउँदै गए र तल्लो स्तरमा झरे । तीनै ऋषि शैनी र सुकलका सन्तान आफूहरू भएको मुसहरहरूले ठान्न थाले र ऋषभदेव भनाउन थाले । मुसहर समुदायमा आजकाल पनि शैनी र सुकलको ठूलो नाम र इज्जत रहेको छ । साथै मुसहरहरू आफूलाई शैनी र सुकलको सन्तान भन्न गौरवको अनुभव गर्दछन् र उनीहरूप्रति श्रद्धा व्यक्त गर्दछन् ।"

तेश्रो किंवदन्ती "दिना र भद्री" सँग गाँसिएको कुराचाहिँ मुसहरहरूको महराई गीत (पूर्वजहरूको वीरतापूर्ण गाथा र व्यथालाई व्यक्त गर्दै माघे संक्रान्ति र आषाढीमा गाइने गीत) बाट थाहा हुन्छ । मुसहरहरू आफ्नो कुलदेवता दिना र भद्री भएका हुनाले आफूलाई दिना र भद्रीका सन्तान मान्दछन् । प्राचीनकालमा सप्तरी जिल्लाको जोगिया जाँजर गाउँमा कालू सदा र आमा नीरसको कोखबाट दुइ पुत्र दिना र भद्री जन्मेका थिए । बालक कालदेखि नै दिना र भद्री दुवै दाजुभाइ वीर र साहसी थिए । ती दुइ दाजुभाइ कुस्ती खेल्न धेरै सिपालु थिए । जनश्रुतिअनुसार जोगिया जाँजर गाउँका भाँकी कनक सिं धामी र श्रीमती बुधनी धमियाइनले दिना र भद्रीको बहादुरीलाई हेर्न सकेनन् र टुना लगाई कटैया जंगलमा लगी मारी दिए ।

कटैया गाउँमा दिना र भद्रीको प्रसिद्ध मन्दिर छ । पछि दिना र भद्रीको आमाले वागेश्वरी प्रसन्न गराई र बुधनी धामियानलाई मारिन भन्ने कुराको उल्लेख छ । मुसहरहरूले दिना र भद्रीलाई कुलदेवता मानी पुजाआजा गर्दै आएका छन् । यो पूजा आषाढ महिनामा गरिन्छ । मुसहरहरू आफूलाई दिना र भद्री सरदारका सन्तान मानी आफूलाई सरदार भन्न रुचाउँदछन् ।

नेपालमा मुसहरहरू शुरुमा आप्रवासीको रूपमा भारतका विभिन्न क्षेत्रबाट आएका हुन् (दाहाल, १९७८, थमस कक्स, १९९४) । क्षेत्री र दाहाल (२०५४) ले मुसहरहरूको बसाई सराई उत्तर भारतको विहार राज्यको सहर्सा, दरभंगा, पूर्णिया, भागलपुर र अररीया जिल्लाहरूबाट अठारौं शताब्दीको प्रारम्भदेखि उन्नाइसौं शताब्दीको अन्त्यसम्मको अवधिमा भएको हुनु पर्दछ भन्ने कुरा उल्लेख गरेका छन् । मुसहरहरू नेपालमा बसाई सराई गर्ने कारणहरूमा १९४५ ई.सं. देखि १९७४ सम्ममा 'रस्ती रसाउने र वस्ती बसाउने' नीतिको अख्तियारी, ई.सं १८६६-७० मा वङ्गाल र विहारमा परेको अनिकाल, ई.सं. १८७३ को विहारको भूकम्प, नेपालको खुल्ला सिमाना तथा नेपाल तराईमा तीव्र नगरीकरणको विकास नै मुख्य रहेका छन् । विहारमा परेको अनिकाल र भूकम्पलाई घटनाक्रममा गणना गर्दा २२८ वर्ष, रस्ती रसाउने र वस्ती बसाउने लालमोहरलाई प्रमाणमा लिंदा २२३ वर्ष, मुसहरहरूले बताएको ९ पुस्ते पुस्तौनी इतिहासलाई प्रमाणमा लिंदा लगभग २२५ वर्ष देखिन आएकोले मुसहरहरूको नेपाल प्रवेशको इतिहास २०० देखि २५० वर्ष भएको अनुमान गर्न सकिन्छ भन्ने कुरा उल्लेख गरेका छन् ।

अध्ययन क्षेत्र फत्तेपुरका मुसहरहरूले आफ्ना पुर्खाहरूको नेपाल आगमन आठ नौ पुस्ता अगाडि भएको बताए तापनि पुख्यौली इतिहास भने पाँच छ पुस्तासम्म मात्र बताउन सकेका छन् । उदाहरणका निमित्त फत्तेपुर गा.वि.स. सिद्धिपुर टोलका रविलाल सदा मुसहरको छ पुस्ते इतिहास यस प्रकार छ—

ललाई सदा मुसहर – कानन सदा मुसहर – तिमाई सदा मुसहर – रविलाल सदा मुसहर – हरिकिसन सदा मुसहर – सरोज सदा मुसहर ।

रविलाल सदा मुसहरले पुस्तौनी इतिहास छ पुस्तासम्म बताएका हुनाले फत्तेपुरमा मुसहरहरूका पुर्खाहरूको आगमन करिव १५० वर्ष अघिदेखिको इतिहास गणना गर्न सकिन्छ । लिखित इतिहासको अभावमा पुख्यौली इतिहासलाई प्रमाणिक मान्नु पर्ने हुन्छ तापनि फत्तेपुरका धेरैजसो मुसहरहरू जमिन्दारहरूका जमीन (कामत) मा बसोवास गर्दछन् । त्यसमा कर्णेल कामत (नाम स्पष्ट हुन नसकेका, नोकरीबाट निवृत्त सेनाका कर्नेल, जसले खेतीका लागि आवश्यक कृषि श्रमिकहरूको आपूर्तिका निमित्त भारतवाट मुसहरहरू ल्याई आफ्नो जमिनदारीमा बसोवास गराएका हुन्), थापा कामत (नाम थाहा हुन नसकेको, काठमाडौं निवासी, कुनै थापा थरका घरानियाँ व्यक्ति जसले आफ्ना खेतीका निमित्त श्रमिकहरू आपूर्तिको लागि भारतवाट मुसहरहरू ल्याई आफ्नो जमीनमा वसोवास गराएका हुन्) र सिंह कामत (जमिन्दार रामानन्दप्रसाद सिंह, भू.पू. एटनी जनरल जसले खेतीको निमित्त आवश्यक कृषि श्रमिकको रूपमा मुसहरहरूलाई भारतबाट भित्र्याई आफ्नै जमीनमा बसोवास

गराई राखेका) मुख्य छन् । यसर्थ जमिनदारी (कामत) का मालिकहरूले आफ्नो खेतीमा आवश्यक पर्ने श्रमिक आपूर्तिका निमित्त उनीहरूलाई भित्र्याएको प्रष्ट हुन आएको छ ।

अध्ययन क्षेत्रका नमुनामा परेका ५० घर संख्याका मुसहरहरूको परिवारको जनसंख्याको उमेर र लिंग अनुरूप जनसंख्या विवरण

उमेर र लिङ्ग समूह जैविक गुणका साथै सामाजिक संरचनामा महत्त्वपूर्ण परिवर्त्यको रूपमा मानिन्छ । त्यसैले जनसंख्या अध्ययनमा उमेर र लिङ्ग समूहलाई आधारभूत विशेषताको रूपमा लिइन्छ ।

अध्ययन क्षेत्र फत्तेपुरमा गरिएको नमुना छनौटमा परेका ५० घर संख्याका परिवारको जनसंख्याको उमेर लिङ्ग र समूह अनुरूप जनसंख्या विवरण तलको तालिकाद्वारा प्रस्तुत गरिएको छ :

तालिका १: अध्ययन क्षेत्रका नमुनामा परेका ५० घर संख्याका मुसहरहरूको परिवारको जनसंख्याको उमेर र लिङ्गअनुरूप विवरण

उमेर समूह (वर्षमा)	पुरुष	महिला	जम्मा	प्रतिशत
०-४	२२	२४	४६	१६.१४
५-९	२३	२६	४६	१६.१४
१०-१४	१४	१३	२७	९.४७
१५-१९	१४	१९	३३	११.५७
२०-२४	१०	९	१९	६.६६
२५-२९	८	८	१६	५.६१
३०-३४	७	१४	२१	७.३७
३५-३९	९	७	१६	५.६१
४०-४४	१०	१०	२०	७.०१
४५-४९	७	३	१०	३.५१
५०-५४	५	७	१२	४.२१
५५-५९	४	३	७	२.४६
६०+	७	५	१२	४.२१
जम्मा:-	१४०	१४५	२८५	१००.००

स्रोत: स्थलगत अध्ययन, २०६१ ।

माथिको तालिका अनुरूप मुसहर समुदायमा औसत परिवारको आकार ५.७ रहेको छ । जुन नेपालको औसत परिवारको आकार ५.५ भन्दा केही बढी छ । त्यस्तै गरेर नमुनामा परेका १४ वर्ष मुनिका मुसहरहरूको जनसंख्या ४१.४७% रहेको छ । त्यसमा पुरुष २०.७०% र महिला २१.०५% रहेको छ । जुन नेपालको १४ वर्ष भन्दा

मुनिको जनसंख्या ३९.३% भन्दा बढी देखिएको छ । यस तथ्याङ्कले सानो समुदायमा औसत परिवारको ढाँचा ठूलो र औसत बालबालिका प्रतिशत बढी भएको प्रष्ट हुन्छ । ६० वर्ष माथिका जनसंख्या ४.२१ प्रतिशत रहेको छ । जसमा पुरुष २.४६ प्रतिशत र महिला १.७५ प्रतिशत रहेको छ । यो प्रतिशत नेपालको बृद्ध जनसंख्याको आकारभन्दा केही घटी छ । यस तथ्यले बृद्ध वृद्धाहरूको बाँच्ने दर अर्थात् जीवन प्रत्यासा (life expectancy) विकसित देशको दाँजोमा घटी रहेको स्पष्ट हुन्छ । त्यसमा पनि पुरुषको भन्दा महिलाको बाँच्ने दर घटी छ । लिङ्ग औसत (sex ratio) ९६.५५ : १०० रहेको छ ।

सामाजिक संरचना र संगठन

परिवार: मुसहरहरू परिवार भन्नाले एकै भान्छामा पकाएको खाना खाने, सामूहिक सम्पत्ति राख्ने र कुनै न कुनै नातेदारी व्यवस्थाबाट सम्बन्धि व्यक्तिहरू वा सदस्यहरूको समष्टि मान्दछन् । अध्ययन क्षेत्र फत्तेपुरमा नमुना छनौटमा परेका ५० घर संख्याको मुसहरहरूको पारिवारिक प्रकार तलको तालिकाद्वारा प्रस्तुत गरिएको छ–

तालिका २: नमुना छनौटमा परेका अध्ययन क्षेत्रका मुसहरहरूको पारिवारिक प्रकार

क्र.सं.	परिवारको प्रकार	परिवार संख्या	प्रतिशत	औसत परिवार आकार
१.	एकात्मक	२९	५८	५.६
२.	संयुक्त/विस्तृत	२१	४२	५.९
	जम्मा:	५०	१००	५.७

स्रोत: स्थलगत अध्ययन, २०६१ ।

मुसहरहरूमा संयुक्त परिवार प्रथा विशेष रुपमा उल्लेखनीय रहेको छ । (श्रेष्ठ र प्रधान, १९७५: २५) । उक्त भनाइसँग यो अध्ययनको नतीजा फरक रहेको छ । तर मुसहरहरू एकात्मक परिवारप्रथा प्रति उन्मुख हुँदैछन् (गौतम र थापामगर, २०४५; क्षेत्री र दाहाल, २०५४; र पोखेल, २०५४, दुलाल: २०५८) का भनाइसँग यस अध्ययनको नतीजाले सामिप्य राख्छ किनकि माथिको तालिकाबाट के देखिन्छ भने एकात्मक परिवार प्रथा ५८% र संयुक्त परिवार प्रथा ४२% रहेको छ अर्थात् मुसहरहरूमा एकात्मक परिवारको प्रथा बढ्दै गएको देखिन्छ । मुसहरहरूमा एकात्मक परिवार प्रथा बढ्दै जानुको मुख्य कारण आर्थिक रहेको छ । मुसहरहरू सुकुम्वासी छन् । जसले गर्दा उनीहरू ज्याला/मजदूरी (जनवैना) गरेर जिउनु पर्दछ । ज्याला मजदूरी गरेर जीविकोपार्जन गर्न सानो परिवार बढी उपयुक्त हुन्छ । कसले कति कमायो वा श्रम गर्यो वा कसले वसी वसी खायो भन्ने कुरामा घरायसी झगडा हुँदैन । अर्कोतर्फ कुनै मुसहर केटीको विवाह भएमा महिलाकै गाउँमा गएर केटाले अर्को छुट्टै झुपडी खडा गरेर बसोवास गर्ने प्रचलन देखिन्छ ।

नाता कुटुम्ब र विशेष साइनोहरू: नातेदारी प्रथा मुसहर सामाजिक संरचनाको महत्वपूर्ण इकाई मानिन्छ । मुसहरहरूमा नातेदारी प्रथा र बोलाउने नाम-साइनो पनि तराईका अन्य समुदायमा जस्तै देखिन्छ (पोखेल, १९९७: २८) । मुसहर समुदायको नातागोता कुटुम्ब छुट्याउने विशेष समिति हुन्छ जसलाई "मर्जादी" भन्दछन् (दवाडी, २०५४: ३७) । सामान्यतया मुसहरहरू आफ्ना नाता कुटुम्बलाई पाँच तहमा छुट्याउँछन्–

१. **रक्ति–** रक्ति भन्ने बित्तिकै रगतको नाता अर्थात् आफ्ना वंशजहरू भन्ने बुझिन्छ । रक्तिले आपसमा कहिले पनि विहेबारी गर्दैनन् र मर्दा जुठो वार्छन् । यस नाता अन्तर्गत बाबु, काका, बडा बाबु, छोरा, भतिजा, नाति, पनाति आउँदछन् ।

२. **शक्ति–** शक्तिले दिदी, बहिनीहरूका लोग्ने पट्टिका नातागोताहरूलाई जनाउँछ ।

३. **कुकल्वाज–** कुकल्वाज भन्नाले दाजुभाइका स्वास्नीका आमा बाबुपट्टिका नातागोताहरूलाई जनाउँछ ।

४. **गृहवासी–** गृहवासी भन्नाले सामान्यतः छरछिमेकी साइनोलाई जनाउँदछ । तापनि गृहवासी (छरछिमेकी साइनो) अन्तर्गत ओल्लो पल्लोघर वा मुसहर समुदाय र गैर मुसहर समुदायका व्यक्तिहरू बीच उमेर अनुरूप आदरार्थी र स्नेहार्थी शब्दको प्रयोग गर्दछन् । मुसहरहरू समानस्तरका जात जस्तो खत्वे (जोलाहा) सँग हितचित्त मिले पछि मितेरी साइनो पनि गाँस्छन् र यस्तो साइनोलाई महत्व पनि दिन्छन् ।

५. **मामा–** मामा भन्नाले आमाको माइतीपट्टिका नातागोताहरूलाई जनाउँछ ।

मुसहर राजनीति: मुसहर समाजमा जातीय नेता 'माइजन' र 'मडर' छनौट गर्दा पहिलो पटक समाजका सबै सदस्यहरू मिली सहमतिका आधारमा छानिन्छ । तर जबसम्म उक्त समुदायबाट कुनै विरोध आउँदैन अथवा उक्त छानिएको व्यक्ति वा परिवारबाट यस सम्बन्धमा असमर्थता प्रकट गरिन्न तबसम्म वंश परम्परागत रुपमा समेत उक्त परिवारभित्रै सो पद रहिरहन्छ ।

अध्ययन क्षेत्र फत्तेपुर सप्तरीका मुसहरहरूको राजनीतिमा माइनजन (मान्यजन) प्रथा तथा मडरप्रथा (जातीय नेता) को रूपमा रहेको पाइन्छ । भारतमा यसैलाई मण्डल र मरार नामले चिनिन्छ । माइनजन गाउँ इकाई वा टोलको जातीय नेता मानिन्छ भने मडर जिल्ला स्तरीय वा क्षेत्रीय स्तरको नेता मानिन्छ । मुसहरहरूबाट छानिएको जातीय नेतालाई 'माइनजन' र 'मडर' भन्दछन् । एकपटक जातीय नेता 'माइनजन' र 'मडर' छानिए पछि वंश परम्परामा जान्छ । जातीय नेता 'माइनजन' र 'मडर' भैसकेको व्यक्ति मरे पछि गाउँका भलादमीहरू जम्मा भई उसैको जेठो छोरोलाई पगरी र लाठी दिएर पुनः माइनजन र मडर बनाउँदछन् । सबै मुसहरहरूले उस माथि आस्था र विश्वास राख्दछन् । यस्तो परम्परा प्रदत्त नेतृत्व (Ascribed Leadership) को उदाहरण हो । माइनजनले स्वजातीय रितिथितिको पालन गराउन र दण्ड दिलाउन उत्तरदायी हुन्छ । माइनजनले समाधान गर्न नसकेका

कुराहरू मडर सामु पेश गर्ने गर्दछ । आफ्नै जाति भित्र हुने व्यभिचारका मामलामा मुसहर समाजमा उच्च दण्ड दिने चलन छ । दण्डस्वरूप रक्सी, सुँगुरको मासु, दालभात र रु. ५० देखि रु. ५०० सम्म नगद अथवा ५ के.जी. देखि ४० के.जी. सम्म अनाज दण्ड गर्ने प्रचलन छ । अन्तरजातिसँग भएका व्यभिचारका मामलामा समाजबाट निकाल्ने, जातिबाट पदच्यूत गर्ने जस्ता दण्ड प्रचलित छन् । मडरलाई सहयोग गर्न जमदारको व्यवस्था पनि गरिएको हुन्छ । संकटको समयमा निर्णय दिने वेला र न्यायिक कार्यमा परामर्श लिनका लागि मडरले वयोवृद्धहरूको परिषद् (council of elders) स्थापना गर्दछ । उनीहरूको परामर्शका आधारमा जातीय आचरण र नियम नमान्नेहरूलाई मडरले दण्ड गर्ने अधिकार छ । निर्धनताको कारणले मडर परम्परा लोप हुँदै गएको व्यहोरा क्षेत्री र दाहाल (२०५४: १७) र दुलाल (२०५८) ले औल्याएका छन् । स्थलगत अध्ययनको क्रममा जातीय नियम र कानून उल्लंघनका घटनाहरू देखिएनन् र जातीय नेताको सक्रीयता पनि खासै देखिएन । यसर्थ मडर परम्परा परिवर्तनको संक्रमणमा छ ।

मुसहर समाज तथा परिवारमा नारी वर्गको स्थिति: यस अध्ययनमा मुसहर समाज तथा परिवारमा नारी वर्गको स्थिति औल्याउने क्रममा सामाजिक, शैक्षिक, वैवाहिक र आर्थिक स्थितिलाई केन्द्रविन्दू बनाई छलफल गरिएको छ । सामाजिक स्थितिको कुरा गर्दा नेपाली समाजका अन्य जातीय समुदायमा झैं मुसहरहरूको समाज पनि पितृप्रधान र पितृ सत्तात्मक एवं पितृगोत्रीय परिवारयुक्त समाज भएकाले नारीको तुलनामा परिवारभित्र पुरुषको हक अधिकार र प्रभुत्व वढी कायम रहेको देखिन्छ (क्षेत्री र दाहाल, २०५४ : ६८) । यसर्थ मुसहर महिलाहरूको स्थिति पुरुषको दाँजोमा तल्लो स्तरको रहेको छ ।

अध्ययनमा समावेश सम्पूर्ण मुसहर महिलाहरू शतप्रतिशत अशिक्षित छन् (हेर्नुहोस् तालिका ३) । शैक्षिक उपलव्धि विना स्वास्थ्य, आयआर्जन जस्ता कुनै पनि क्षेत्रमा अगाडि बढ्न नसकिने स्वतःसिद्ध छ । यसले गर्दा महिलाहरूले आफ्नो आत्मोन्नति मात्र गर्न नसक्ने होइन कि समाज र देश विकासमा योगदान दिनसमेत वाधा पर्दछ । मुसहर महिलाहरू मजदुरी तथा घरेलु काममा व्यस्त रहने भएकाले निश्चित उमेर पुगेपछि दैनिक रोजगारीबाट आउने नगद आयबाट पारिवारिक गुजारा गर्नमा नै अभ्यस्त छन् । यस सामाजिक पृष्ठभूमिमा मुसहर महिलाहरूमा शिक्षाप्रति चासो नदेखिनु स्वभाविक हो ।

मुसहर महिलाको स्थिति मूल्याङ्न गर्ने सन्दर्भमा वैवाहिक परिवर्त्यलाई समेत उल्लेख गर्नु अत्यावश्यक छ । मुसहर समाज वहुपत्नी विवाह प्रथा भएको समाज हो । विवाहित महिला बाँझी भएमा र छोरी मात्र जन्माएमा सौता खेप्न बाध्य हुनु पर्दछ । केवल विधवा विवाह (देवर विवाह, चुमाउन र घरढुकी) प्रचलनले महिलाहरूलाई केही राहत दिएको छ ।

अन्ततः मुसहर महिलाको आर्थिक स्थितिलाई मूल्याङ्न गर्ने क्रममा पेशागत विवरणलाई मूल आधार मानिएको छ । नमुनामा परेका ५० घरका (१० वर्ष माथिका

मुसहर) महिलाहरूमध्ये अधिकांश कृषिश्रम र घरायसी पेशामा संलग्न छन् । अन्य पेशामा नगण्य रूपमा रहेका छन् (हेर्नुहोस् तालिका ६) ।

सम्पत्ति माथि अधिकारको प्रश्नमा पनि घरमूली बाबु हुने र पछि सो अधिकार छोरामा हस्तान्तरण हुने प्रथा कायमै छ । दाइजो वा पेवाको पनि त्यतिसारो प्रचलन नभएको, वनीवुती, जनवैना गरेर ल्याएको पारिश्रमिक पनि सामूहिक परिवारको खर्चमा व्यहोर्नु पर्ने हुनाले महिलाहरूको व्यक्तिगत बचतको राशि पनि कमै देखिन्छ ।

शैक्षिक स्थिति: मुसहरहरूको शैक्षिक स्थितिको अध्ययनबाट उनीहरूको सामाजिक अवस्था (social status) बारे प्रकाश पारिएको छ । तलको तालिकाबाट नमुनामा परेका ५० घर मुसहर परिवारको शैक्षिक स्थिति स्पष्ट हुन्छ :

तालिका ३: नमुनामा परेका मुसहरहरूको पारिवारिक शैक्षिक स्थिति (६ वर्षभन्दा माथि)

क्र.सं.	शैक्षिक स्थिति	पुरुष	महिला	जम्मा	प्रतिशत
१.	अशिक्षित	१००	११६	२१६	९४.३
२.	साधारण लेखपढ	१३	–	१३	५.७
जम्मा		११३ (४९.३%)	११६ (५०.६%)	२२९	१००

स्रोत: स्थलगत अध्ययन, २०६१ ।

मुसहरहरूको शैक्षिक स्थिति अत्यन्तै पिछडिएको छ । अध्ययनका नमुनामा परेका ५० घरका (६ वर्ष माथिका) कुल २२९ मुसहरहरू मध्ये १३ जना (५.७%) साधारण लेखपढ गर्न जान्ने छन् भने ठूलो संख्या २१६ (९४.३%) अशिक्षित छन् । साधारण लेखपढ गर्न जान्नेहरूमा पुरुष मुसहरहरू मात्र छन् । अध्ययनमा समावेश मुसहर महिलाको शिक्षाको कुरा गर्दा कुल ११६ महिलाहरू सबै निरक्षर छन् । अर्थात् शतप्रतिशत अशिक्षित छन् । यो प्रतिशत सन् २००१ को राष्ट्रिय जनगणना अनुसार दलित पुरुष साक्षरता प्रतिशत १०.७ र दलित महिला साक्षरता प्रतिशत ३.३ प्रतिशत भन्दा ज्यादै न्यून छ । अध्ययनको क्रममा विद्यालय जान शुरु गरेका कुनै पनि मुसहर बालिका भेटिएनन् । अशिक्षित अधिकांश महिलाहरूको स्थिति तल्लो स्तरको हुनु स्वभाविकै हो । त्यसैले नेपाल सरकारको सहश्राब्दि विकास लक्ष्य (Millenium Development Goals) को सन् २०१५ सम्म सम्पूर्ण नेपालीहरूलाई शिक्षित बनाउने कुरा अपूर्ण हुन सक्दछ र यसैगरी महिला शिक्षाका सन्दर्भमा यो लक्ष्य पूरा गर्ने भन्ने कुरा कोरा कल्पना मात्र हुन जानेछ ।

मुसहर धार्मिक विश्वास, चाडपर्व र संस्कारहरू: मुसहरहरू विभिन्न किसिमका देवी-देवता, प्रेतात्मा, भूतात्मा, धामी-झाँक्री, डायनी जस्ता धारणामा विश्वास राख्दछन् । आफूलाई हिन्दू भन्दछन् । तर यिनीहरूका कर्मकाण्ड, विधि-विधान, धार्मिक क्रियाकलाप उपल्लो जातका परम्परागत हिन्दूहरू भन्दा केही फरक छन् । यिनीहरू

शक्ति पूजा प्रति अत्यन्तै आकर्षित छन् र देवीलाई देवताभन्दा शक्तिशाली ठान्दछन् (गौतम र थापामगर, १९९४: ९२) । मुसहरहरू आफ्ना जातीय देवीदेवताहरू (मुसन, सकुन, कंश, कैलु, रनु, लक्तरे र तिला गरी ७ सरदारहरू) का अतिरिक्त हिन्दू देवदेवीहरू– ब्रह्मा, विष्णु, महेश्वर, लक्ष्मी, पार्वती, काली, गणेशको पूजा तथा उपासना गर्दछन् । मुसहरहरूले पूजाआजा गर्ने देवदेवीहरूलाई तल उल्लेख गरिएको छ–

गृहदेवदेवीहरू: मरेर गएका वीर पुर्खाहरू/कुलदेवताहरूको आफ्नो घरको गहवर वा पुजा कोठामा पूजा गर्दछन् । त्यसमा मुख्यगरेर मुसन, लनु, कंश, कैलु, रनु लक्तरे र तीला (सात सरदार) हरू रहेका छन् । देवीहरूमा– गाँगो, रूपना, मैना, वागेश्वरी, वीसहरा, काली, संसारी, सितला आदि मुख्य रहेका छन् ।

ग्राम देवदेवीहरू: घर बाहिर आञ्चलिक उत्पत्तिका देवदेवीहरूको पूजाआजा गर्दछन्–
१. राजाजीहरू– (राजा राजपाल, भीमसेन, राजा रणपाल, सहलेस, भलुवाराजा छन्) ।
२. तुमढी मुखिया (नामको आधारमा किराँती उत्पत्तिका थिए भन्ने बुझिन्छ । बोका, रक्सी चढाएर पूजा गर्दछन्) ।
३. गहिल देवी– (हातखुट्टा नचल्ने रोगबाट मुक्त हुनको लागि पूजाआजा गर्दछन् ।) गहिलका दस दिदीबहिनीहरूमा– एकची, दुधवसी, तिहिया, चम्की, लुल्नी, छन्तो, सतनीया, नन्दी र सम्पूर्णी रहेका छन् भन्ने मान्दछन् ।
४. दिना र भद्री– प्रत्येक मुसहरीमा एउटा गोलाकार वा चारकुने आकारको माटाको ढिस्को बनाएको हुन्छ । त्यसलाई आफ्नो पुर्खा दिना र भद्रीको स्थायी थान मानेर मुसहरहरूले पूजाआजा गर्दछन् ।
५. विभिन्न धामीहरू– कनक सिंह, विद्यापति र गोनार आदि ।

जल तथा वृक्ष पूजा: मुसहरहरूले आफ्नो टोल वरपर खोलानाला, इनार, कुवा, पोखरी आदिको पूजा आजा गर्दछन् । आफ्नो बस्ती नवगाओस र जनवैना/श्रम गर्न गएका आफ्ना परिवारहरू सुरक्षित फर्किउन भन्ने भावनाले जलपूजा गर्दछन् । मुसहरहरू वरपीपल, नीम, केरा, आँप, बाँस, तुलसी, बेल, दुवो इत्यादिको पूजाआजा पनि गर्दछन् । यी वृक्षहरूमा अदृश्यशक्ति मसान, भूतप्रेत आदि बस्दछन् भन्ने भावनाले पूजाआजा गर्दछन् ।

चाडपर्व तथा उत्सवहरू : अध्ययन क्षेत्र फत्तेपुरका मुसहरहरूले मनाउने मुख्य मुख्य चाडपर्वहरूमा जुरशितल, घडीपावैन, रइत/आइतवारी, दशहरा, शुक्रैत, समाचकेवा, छठपुजा, नेमान, तिला संक्रान्ति, फगुवा, आदि मुख्य रहेका छन् ।

संस्कारहरू

जन्म, विवाह र मृत्यु संस्कारलाई अनिवार्य र महत्त्वपूर्ण रूपमा स्वीकारेर सम्पन्न गर्दछन् ।

जन्म संस्कारः मुसहरहरूमा सहवास तथा स्त्री-पुरुष यौन सम्बन्ध राख्ने बारे कुनै शास्त्रीय विधान छैन । गर्भ रहेपछि सुरक्षित रहोस् भन्ने उद्देश्यले लोग्ने र गर्भवती स्त्री दुवैलाई केही खास काम गर्न निषेधित गरिएको हुन्छ । लोग्नेले मारकाट नगर्नु, लास नवोक्नु र स्त्रीले पोथी र बुहारी माछा नखानु, मसानमा नजानु, खोला नतर्नु, पाँच महिनादेखि सहवास नगर्नु आदि रहेका छन् । सुत्केरी व्यथा लागेपछि सौरी घरमा राखिन्छ । सुडेनीद्वारा सुत्केरी गराइन्छ । सुत्केरी भएको पाँच दिनसम्म सुतक वार्ने चलन छ । पाँच दिनसम्म सुत्केरी महिला र नवजात शिशुलाई सौरीघरमा राखिन्छ । दुवैलाई कसैले छुनु हुँदैन । छैठौं दिनमा न्वारान अर्थात् छठियारी गर्दछन् । त्यसै दिनमा बच्चाको नाम राख्ने गर्दछन् । नाम राख्दा जन्मेको वार, शारीरिक बनावट, वर्ण, जन्मेको महिना, घटेका घटना, देवी, देवताको नामसँग सम्बन्धित नाम राख्दछन् ।

पास्नीः मुसहरहरूमा पास्नीको त्यतिसारो प्रचलन छैन । आर्थिक रूपले सम्पन्न मुसहरहरूमा नवजात शिशु ५-६ महिनाको भएपछि आमा बाबुद्वारा कुनै शास्त्रीय विधि विधान नगरी त्यत्तिकै ठोस आहार खुवाउने गर्दछन् ।

मुरोन / मुण्डनः मुण्डन अर्थात् छेवर संस्कार पनि मुसहरहरूमा त्यतिसारो प्रचलनमा छैन । केही हुनेखानेले आफ्नो क्षमता अनुसार सम्पन्न गर्दछन् । बालक पाँच वर्षको भएपछि मुण्डनका लागि निश्चित दिन निर्धारण गर्दछन् । मुण्डनका दिन परिवारका सबै आफन्तहरूका उपस्थितिमा बालकलाई आमाको काखमा राखी हजामद्वारा कपाल काटिन्छ र गंगा नदी वा बाँसको झाङ्गमा फाल्दछन् र पाठी काटेर भोज खुवाउने चलन छ ।

विवाह संस्कारः मुसहर समुदायमा मुख्यतः मागी विवाह र संबन्धित परिवार बीच सट्टा विवाह (गोलट विवाह) प्रथा प्रचलनमा रहेको छ ।

फत्तेपुरका मुसहरहरूले विवाह गर्दा अनेकौं कर्महरू सम्पन्न गर्छन् । पहिले पहिले विवाह सम्पन्न गर्न ७ दिन लाग्नेमा हाल ३ दिन लगाएर सम्पन्न गर्दछन् । मुसहर समुदायमा मागी विवाह सम्पन्न गर्दा विशेष गरी देखासुनी (वरबधु छनौट कार्य सम्पन्न गर्ने), डिही मिलावन (कुलदेवता र पुख्यौंली छुट्याउने कार्य सम्पन्न गर्ने), पानचडीया (विवाहको दिन तोक्ने कार्य गर्ने), मटकारा (केटा र केटीले तेल र चामलको पीठो दल्ने र नुहाउने र इनार पूजा गर्ने), तेलकासा र कुमरन, लावा, मडुवा बनावन (लावा भुट्ने र विवाह मण्डप बनाउने कार्य सम्पन्न गर्ने), विलौकी (विवाह गरिने केटी र गीत हार्नेहरू मिलेर पाँच आँगन डुलेर पैसा र चामल संकलन गर्ने), वर्यादी प्रस्थान (जन्ती जाने), तिलक, ठोगर र काधन (केटीको तर्फबाट केटालाई कपडा र गरगहना दिने), सिन्दूरदान (केटोले केटीको सिउदोमा सिन्दुर

हाल्ने), सनाइवाट (केटा र केटीको कान्छीऔलाबाट रगत झिकी खीरमा हालेर खुवाउने) आदि जस्ता महत्त्वपूर्ण विधिहरू सम्पन्न गरिन्छन् ।

फत्तेपुरका मुसहरहरूमा बालविवाह र विधवा विवाह (देवर विवाह, घरढुकी र चुमाउन) प्रथा प्रचलनमा रहेको छ । नमुनामा परेका ५० घरका कुल ७९ मुसहर महिलाहरूको विवाह गर्दाको उमेर तलको तालिकामा प्रस्तुत गरिएको छ

तालिका ४: नमुनामा परेका मुसहर महिलाहरूको विवाह गर्दाको उमेर

उमेर समूह	संख्या	प्रतिशत
१०–१२	३	३.८
१३–१५	१०	१२.६
१६–१८	३३	४१.८
१९+	३३	४१.८
जम्मा	७९	१००

स्रोतः स्थलगत अध्ययन, २०६१ ।

फत्तेपुरका मुसहरहरूका अध्ययनमा नमुनामा लिइएका ५० घरका कुल ७९ मुसहर महिलाहरू मध्ये १० वर्षदेखि १८ वर्षको उमेरमा विवाह हुने ५८% र १९ वर्षभन्दा माथिको उमेरमा विवाह हुनेको प्रतिशत ४२% रहेको देखिन्छ । यस तथ्यबाट मुसहर समाजमा बाल विवाह अझै प्रचलनमा रहेको पाइन्छ । बाल विवाहको कारणले महिलाहरूको स्थिति तल्लो स्तरको हुनु स्वभाविकै छ ।

मृत्यु संस्कारः मृत्युलाई मुसहरहरू स्वाभाविक र डाइनी, भूतप्रेत, पाप र अपराधद्वारा प्रेरित रोग, आत्महत्या तथा दुर्घटना प्रभावित हुने मृत्युमा गणना गर्दछन् ।

मुसहरहरू मानिस सिकिस्त विरामी भएपछि धामी झाँक्री बोलाउँछन् । कानमा मन्त्र पढी ओभ्याले झारफुक गर्दछन् । यति गरेपछि मरेको लाशलाई आँगनमा ल्याई नुहाई लुगाफेरी दिई खटमाथि बाँध्ने गर्दछन् । खट हरियो बाँसको हुन्छ । लाश छोराले, नातेदार र रक्ति/दियादीले बोक्दछन् । अन्त्येष्टी संस्कार जलाउने वा गाड्ने दुवै गर्दछन् । घाटमा लाश लिएर जाँदा मृतकले प्रयोग गर्ने सबै सरसामानहरू लाससँगै सेलाईदिने गर्दछन् ।

फत्तेपुरका मुसहरहरूमा तेह्र दिनसम्म क्रिया बार्ने गर्दछन् । छोरा भए जेठो छोराले मात्र क्रियामा बस्ने चलन छ । छोरा नभए भाइ, भाइ नभए भतिजा र भतिजा पनि नभए छोरीले कपाल काटेर ४ दिनसम्म कोरामा बस्नु पर्ने चलन छ । मुसहरहरूमा तेह्र दिनसम्म गरिने कर्महरू निम्नानुसार छन्–

१. दूमधु विघ (विधि)– यो दोश्रो दिनमा गरिने विधि हो । यस्मा मृतकका नातेदारहरूले मृतकको नाममा पानी र दुधको खोल (धार) लाई निमपातिको माध्यमबाट चढाउने चलन छ ।

२. छोरझापी विघ– चौथो दिनमा गरिने विधिलाई छोरझापी विघ भनिन्छ । यस विधि अन्तर्गत ढिकुरो उठाउने र मलामीलाई भोज खुवाउने गरिन्छ ।

३. सतलहन विध– सातौं दिनमा गरिने विधिलाई सतलहन विध भनिन्छ । यस विध अन्तर्गत पाँच पिण्डदान गरिन्छ ।

४. नइकेश विध– एघारौं दिनमा गरिने विधिलाई नइकेश विध भनिन्छ । घरका नातेदार र कर्ताले कपाल र नङ्ग काट्ने कार्य गर्दछन् भने कर्ताले एघारवटा पिण्डदान गर्दछ ।

५. वार्पिता विध– बाह्रौं दिनमा गरिने विधिलाई वार्पिता विध भनिन्छ । यसमा मुख्य गरेर श्राद्ध गरिन्छ । यस विधि अन्तर्गत दुइ चारजना मलामी बोलाएर दही च्युरा खुवाइन्छ ।

६. शुद्धिदान विध– यस विधि अन्तर्गत तेह्र वटा पिण्ड दान गर्ने र पुरानो कपडा छोडेर नयाँ कपडा फेर्ने चलन छ । त्यसपछि कर्ता शुद्ध भएको मानिन्छ र मासु र नून खान फुकुवा हुन्छ ।

७. ६ मासिक विध– छ महिनामा श्राद्ध गरिन्छ ।

८. वार्षिकी विध– श्राद्ध गरी आफन्तहरूलाई भोज खुवाइन्छ । हाल निर्धनताको कारणले ६ मासिकी र वार्षिकी विधिको प्रचलन हट्दै गएको छ ।

आधारभूत सांस्कृतिक विशेषताहरू

भौतिक (मूर्त) र अभौतिक (अमूर्त) गरी दुई प्रकारले विभाजन गरी कुनै पनि संस्कृतिको अध्ययन गर्ने गरिएको छ । भौतिक संस्कृतिअन्तर्गत भाषा, पहिरन, शारीरिक बनावट, घरवास, खानपीन, भाँडावर्तनहरू, हातहतियार, औजार आदि पर्दछन् भने अभौतिक संस्कृतिअन्तर्गत धर्म, परम्परा, विश्वासहरू, कानून, देवीदेवताहरू, चाडपर्वहरू आदि पर्दछन् । मुसहर संस्कृतिका विशेषताहरूलाई उल्लेख गर्ने क्रममा सोही आधारलाई अंगालिएको छ :–

तालिका ५: आधारभूत सांस्कृतिक विशेषताहरू

भौतिक संस्कृतिको विशेषताहरू	अभौतिक संस्कृतिको विशेषताहरू
१. पहिरन (क) मुसहर पुरुषको परम्परागत पहिरन– धोती र कमीज हुन् । (ख) मुसहर महिलाको परम्परागत पहिरन– ब्लाउज र साडी हुन् । (ग) युवायुवतीहरूको पहिरनमा परिवर्तन देखिएको छ ।	**१. भाषा** (क) मुसहरहरूको आफ्नो भाषा लोप भैसकेको छ । (ख) मैथिलीको प्रभाव क्षेत्र (जनकपुर पूर्व) का मुसहरहरूले मैथिली भाषा र भोजपुरी प्रभाव क्षेत्र (वारा, पर्सा, चितवन) का मुसहरहरूले भोजपुरी भाषा बोल्दछन् । (ग) सप्तरीका अधिकांश मुसहरहरू मैथिली बोल्दछन् तर उनीहरूको भाषामा थारु भाषा मिसिएको पाइन्छ ।
२. शारीरिक बनावट (क) श्याम वर्ण, वाक्ला ओठ, सानो साँगुरो निधार, ठूलो थेप्चिएको नाक, चहकिला ठूला आँखा, मुसहरहरूका शारीरिक विशेषताहरू हुन् ।	**२. धर्म** मुसहरहरू हिन्दु धर्म मान्दछन् । काली, दुर्गा, विष्णु, महादेव, लक्ष्मी, वज्रंगवली गणेशको पूजा उपासना गर्दछन् । **३. विश्वासहरू** (क) मुसहरहरू आध्यात्मिक शक्ति माथि विश्वास गर्दछन् । (ख) मुसहरहरू धामी भाँकी माथि विश्वास राख्दछन् ।
३. घरवास– अधिकांश मुसहरहरूको घरवास ऐलानी जग्गामा र अरूको कामत (जमिन्दारी) आदिमा रहेका हुन्छन् । आफ्नो जमिन हुनेहरू एकदमै कम छन् । घर फुसको झुपडी रहेको हुन्छ । आफ्नो विवाहित छोरा बुहारीसमेत सँगै राख्नु साथै कठिन हुने ८ x १२ फिट लम्बाई चौडाई भएको साँघुरो फुसको घर हुन्छ ।	**४. देवदेवीहरू** (क) घरभित्र गहवर वा पुजाकोठा बनाई पुजा गर्ने देवदेवीहरू– मरेर गएका पुर्खा पुजा/कुलपुजा । (ख) देवताहरू (मुसन, लनु, कंश, कैलु, लप्तरे, रनु र तीला, सरदारहरू) देवीहरूमा– गाँगो, रूपना, मैना, बिसहरा, बागेश्वरी, संसारी, सितला आदि । (ख) ग्राम देवदेवीहरू– १. राजाजीहरू (भीमसेन, रणपाल, सहलेस, भलुवाराजा) २. तुमढी मुखिया (हेनुंहोस, ग्रामदेवदेवीहरू) ३. गहिल देवी (लकुवा रोग) (हातखुट्टा लुलो भई नचल्ने रोग) लागेमा पूजा गरिने देवी । ४. गुरुद्वारा–कवीर र रामोत पन्थीहरूको पवित्र स्थान । ५. दिना र भद्री– प्रत्येक मुसहर वस्तीमा एउटा गोलाकार वा चारकुन्ने लाम्चो आकारको माटोको ढिस्को बनाएर आफ्नो पुर्खाको स्मरण स्वरूप दिना र भद्रीको स्थायी थान मान्ने गर्दछन् । ६. विभिन्न धामीहरू (जस्तोः कनकसिंह, विद्यापति, गोनर आदि) ७. जल तथा वृक्ष पुजा– आफ्नो वस्ती नवगाओस तथा रुखबिरुवामा अदृश्य शक्ति मसान बस्दछन् भन्ने भावनाले पूजाआजा गर्दछन् ।
४. भाँडा वर्तन, हातहतियार र औजार (क) घरायसी प्रयोगमा ल्याइने– मटचैला (पानी बोक्ने माटाको गाग्री) डाबा (पानी राख्ने भाँडो), लोहोटा (पानी खाने भाँडो), लोहिया (कन्ती), हण्डी (भात पकाउने भाँडो), कथौटा (आरी), थरिया (थाल) खापेर (तावा) आदि । (ख) खेतीको निमित्त पुरुषले प्रयोग गर्ने– खन्ती, कुदाल, फरार, टल्ला, हलो, चौकी । (ग) खेतीका निमित्त महिलाले प्रयोग गर्ने पसनी, हँसुवा, ढकीया ।	**५. चाडपर्वहरू** (क) जुराशितल/सिरुवा– वैशाख– नववर्षारम्भ । (ख) मूलपर्व/आषाढी– आषाढ–कुलदेवताको पूजा । (ग) घडीपावैन– साउन– साउने संक्रान्ति मनाउने । (घ) रइत/आइतवारी– भाद्र–भादमहिनाको पहिलो आइतवार व्रतवसी दहीच्युरा खाने वा गच्छेअनुसार फलफूल र मिठाई (साकाहारी भोजन) खाने । (ङ) दसहरा– आश्विन– दशैं पर्व मनाउने । (च) शुक्रैत पर्व– कार्तिक– लक्ष्मीपूजा । (छ) समाचकेवा– कार्तिक पूर्णिमा– सानो सानो मूर्ति बनाई चौरमा गई गीत गाउँदै पूजाआजा गर्ने । (ज) छठपूजा– कार्तिक– सूर्यपूजा । (झ) नेमान– मार्ग–अगहन । (ञ) तिलासंक्रान्ति– माघ–माघेसंक्रान्ति पर्व मनाउने । (ट) फगुवा–फाल्गुण– होली ।

मुसहर जातीय प्रविधि र अर्थतन्त्रका प्रमुख विशेषताहरू

जातीय प्रविधिः मुसहर जातीय प्रविधि भन्नाले ज्ञान, सीप र उद्यमशीलतालाई बुभ्नु पर्दछ । मुसहरहरूका उल्लेख्य जातीय प्रविधिहरू खासै छैनन् । तराईमा खेतको डिल (आली) बनाउन, बाँध, पैनी बनाउन, माटो कटान गर्न, माछा मार्नु (कहारी गर्नु), खलीहनबाट धान बटुल्न र मुसा मार्न उनीहरू विशेष सिपालु मानिन्छन् । मुसहरहरूले परम्परागत यन्त्र कोदालो (फररा) र टल्ला प्रयोग गर्दछन् । यो टल्ला (माटो बोक्ने भार) काठमाडौंका नेवार किसानहरूले प्रयोग गर्ने चः खमु (चउ खर्पन) जस्तै छ ।

अर्थतन्त्रका मुख्य विशेषताहरूः मुसहरहरू अधिकांशतः सुकुम्बासी भएकाले स्वतन्त्र कृषि मजदूरी नै उनीहरूको अर्थतन्त्रका विशेषता रहेका छन् । पशुधनको उपयोग पनि एकदमै सीमित संख्या (marginal number) मा छ । अध्ययनमा समावेश ५० घर मुसहरहरू मध्ये १४ घर मुसहरहरूसँग गाई, बाखा, सुँगुर, हाँस, परेवा गरी जम्मा संख्या २९ मात्र रहेको छ । अर्थात् औसत रूपमा १ परिवारसँग १.८०% पशु मात्र रहेको छ । सुकुम्बासी भएका हुनाले खेतीपातीका लागि पशुपालन गर्नु आवश्यक छैन । अतिरिक्त आम्दानी गर्नका लागि स्थानको अभाव र जनवनियारीमा जानु पर्ने भएकाले पनि पशुपालन व्यवसाय सीमित रुपमा हुन गएको छ ।

घरको आकार प्रकारलाई मूल्याँकन गर्दा नमुनामा परेका ५० घर मुसहरहरू मध्ये सम्पूर्णको भुइँतले भुपडी मात्र रहेको देखिन्छ । यस्ता भुपडी १० x ११ फिटको भुइँतले भुपडी रहेको हुन्छ । भुइँमा नै विछ्यौना लगाई ४-५ जनासम्मलाई लहरै सुत्लसम्म जसोतसो पुग्दछ । चर्पी र घरभित्र हावा जाने ठाउँ (Toilets and ventilation) समेत हुँदैन । भान्छा घर, भण्डारघर भनेर परिचय गराउने ठाऊँ नै हुँदैन । यसर्थ घरको वनावटको आधारमा पनि मुसहरहरूको आर्थिक स्थिति दयनीय देखिन्छ । नमुनामा परेका ५० घर मुसहरहरूको पारिवारिक पेशागत विवरण तलको तालिकाद्वारा स्पष्ट हुन्छ:

तालिका ६: नमुनामा परेका मुसहरहरूको पारिवारिक पेशागत विवरण (१० वर्षदेखि माथि)

क्र.सं	पेशागत विवरण	पुरुष	महिला	जम्मा	प्रतिशत
१.	कृषि श्रम	४८ (२४.८७%)	९४(४८.७%)	१४२	७३.५८
२.	नोकर (घरेलु)	१४ (७.२५%)	-	१४	७.२५
३.	घरायसी	५ (२.५९%)	५ (२.५९%)	१०	५.१८
४.	अन्य पेशा	२५ (१२.९५%)	२ (१.०४%)	२७	१२.९८
	जम्माः	९२ (४७.६६%)	१०१ (५२.३३%)	१९३	१००

स्रोतः स्थलगत अध्ययन, २०६१ ।

माथिको तालिकाअनुसार कृषि श्रम गर्ने मुसहरहरू ७३.५८% रहेका छन् । कृषि श्रमअन्तर्गत खेत जोत्ने, बाली लगाउने र काट्ने, पोखरी खन्ने, कुलो, पैनी बनाउने (नहर खन्ने) परम्परागत पेशा हो ।

नोकर (घरेलु) पेशा गर्नेहरू ७.२५% रहेका छन् । यीमध्ये हलिया बस्ने, चरुवा वस्ने आदि मुख्य छन् भने ज्याला रकम नगद र जिन्सी दुवैमा प्रचलित छ । घरायसी (५.१८%) पेशा बताउनेहरूमा वृद्ध महिला र पुरुषहरू पर्दछन् । जसमा भान्छाको काम, साना नानीहरूको हेरचाह गर्ने कार्य आदि पर्दछन् ।

हाल आएर स्थानीय क्षेत्रमा नै रिक्सा चलाउने, ट्याक्टर चलाउने, राईस मिलमा काम गर्नुका साथै भारतको हरियाणा र चण्डीगढ तथा काठमाडौंका ईटा भट्टाहरूमा समेत मौसमी श्रमको निमित्त आप्रवासमा जाने गर्दछन् ।

सांस्कृतिक योगदान, आधुनिकीकरणको प्रभाव तथा नेपालीकरण

मुसहर जाति र संस्कृतिको योगदानः सन् १९९१ र २००१ को जनगणना अनुसार मुसहरहरूको जनसंख्या नेपालको कुल जनसंख्याको दाँजोमा क्रमशः ०.७७% र ०.७६% रहेको छ । औलोको प्रकोप र जंगली जनावर, विषालु सर्पहरूसँग लड्दै तराईका जंगल फँडानी गरी आवादी गर्ने (रस्ती रसाउने तथा वस्ती बसाउने) कार्य र जमिन्दारहरूका जमीन (कामत) मा बसोबास गर्दै उनीहरूलाई आवश्यक पर्ने कृषि मजदूरको आवश्यकता पूर्ति गर्ने कार्यसमेतलाई मूल्याइन गर्ने हो भने यस कार्यमा मुसहर जातिको ठूलो योगदान देखिन्छ ।

मुसहरहरूको परम्परागत संस्कृतिलाई चिनाउने जातीय कार्यहरू जस्तो माटो कटान, मुसा समात्ने र खाने क्रियाकलापहरू हालसम्म प्रचलनमा छ । प्रत्येक मुसहर वस्तीमा 'दिना र भद्री' को प्रतीकको रुपमा एउटा गोलाकार वा चारकुने लाम्चो आकारको माटाको ढिस्को बनाइएको हुन्छ । जसले मुसहर संस्कृतिलाई भल्काउँछ । त्यसैगरी सप्तरीको कटैयामा रहेको दिना र भद्रीको एउटै मात्र मन्दिरले मुसहर संस्कृतिको योगदानमा ठूलो भूमिका खेलेको छ । यो मन्दिर नेपाल र भारतमा समेत प्रख्यात छ ।

संस्कृतिमा आधुनिकीकरणको प्रभाव र परिवर्तनः मूर्त अर्थात् भौतिक संस्कृति अन्तर्गत आवास व्यवस्था, घरेलु उपकरण र जातीय प्रविधिहरू (Indigenious Technology) जस्तो माछा मार्नु (कहारी गर्नु), खेतको आलीको डिल बनाउनु (टाला काट्नु), धान काटिसकेको खेत (खलिहन) बाट धान बटुल्नु र मुसा मार्नु आदि कार्यमा मुसहरहरूले आफ्नो परम्परा कायमै राखेका छन् । त्यस्तै गरी अमूर्त अर्थात् अभौतिक संस्कृति जस्तो धार्मिक परम्परा, विश्वास, चाडपर्व, संस्कार आदिमा पनि मुसहरहरूले आफ्नो परम्परा कायमै राखेका छन् । अशिक्षित मुसहर समाजमा पत्रपत्रिका पढ्ने कुरै भएन । दैनिक गुजारा गर्न कठिन हुने समाजमा रेडियो, टि.भि. र अन्य आधुनिकीकरणलाई भल्काउने सामानहरूको प्रयोगको कल्पना नगर्नु नै उपयुक्त छ । तापनि अहिले आएर मुसहर युवा युवतीहरूमा आधुनिक पहिरनको

प्रभाव बढ्दो छ । मौसमी श्रमको लागि बाहिर जाने क्रम बढ्दो छ । एकात्मक परिवार प्रथा बढ्दो छ । जातीय नेतृत्व प्रथा लोपोन्मुख छ । नागरिकताको प्रमाणपत्र लिने चासो बढ्दो छ । परिवार नियोजन प्रतिको चासो बढ्दो छ । कबीर र रामोत जस्ता धार्मिक अनुयायीहरूसँगको सम्पर्कले गर्दा मुसहरहरू ती धार्मिक आस्थाप्रति आकर्षित हुन थालेका छन् । यसरी मुसहर समाजमा जे जति परिवर्तन देखिन्छन् ती साधारण र सिलसिलाबद्ध छन् ।

नेपालीकरण, संस्कृतिकरण र नगरीकरण

आठ दश पुर्खा अगाडिदेखि नेपालमा बसोवास गर्दै आएको पुख्यौली इतिहास बताउने मुसहरहरू आफूलाई दिना र भद्रीका सन्तान बताउँछन् । दिना र भद्रीको मन्दिर सप्तरीको कटैयामा छ नेपालका मुसहरहरू आफ्नो मूलथलो कटैया भएको बताउन गर्व गर्छन् । फत्तेपुर, सप्तरीमा गरिएको अध्ययनमा नमुना छनौटमा परेका ५० घर मुसहरमध्ये घरसंख्या २९ (७७%) ले नागरिकता नपाएको बताउँछन् । केवल ११ घर (२२%) ले मात्र नागरिकता पाएका छन् । ठूलो संख्याका मुसहरहरूले नागरिकता पाएका छैनन् र बेनागरिक बनेका छन् । बेनागरिक मुसहरहरू राज्यद्वारा प्रत्याभूत गरिने अत्यावश्यक मानवीय कुराहरू अर्थात् मानव अधिकारबाट वञ्चित छन् । बेनागरिक मुसहरहरूले नेपाललाई राष्ट्रको रुपमा अंगिकार गर्ने र समर्पणभाव व्यक्त गरी नेपालीकरणको प्रक्रियामा आउन सकिरहेका छैनन् । हाल संसदबाट विशेष नागरिकता बिधेक पारित भैसकेको छ । त्यसले मुसहरहरूको नागरिकता समस्यालाई संबोधन गरी नेपालीकरणको प्रक्रियामा लैजाने छ भन्ने आशा गर्न सकिन्छ ।

मुसहरहरू हिन्दुवर्ण व्यवस्थामा दलित जाति हुन् । स्थानीय स्तरमा जसको प्रभाव वढी छ उसैको प्रभाव अरुको संस्कृतिमा पर्नु स्वाभाविक मानिन्छ । अध्ययन क्षेत्र फत्तेपुर गा.वि.स. पनि थारु प्रभावित क्षेत्र भएकोले मुसहरहरूको संस्कृतिका केही पक्षहरूमा थारु संस्कृतिको प्रभाव परेको छ । उदाहरणको निमित्त फत्तेपुर मुसहरहरू थारु र मैथिली मिश्रित भाषा बोल्दछन् ।

अध्ययन क्षेत्र फत्तेपुर विद्यालय, टेलिफोन, विजुली, हेल्थपोष्ट, यातायात र वजार सुविधाले सम्पन्न छ । फत्तेपुर बजार नजिकै सडक छेउ बस्ने मुसहरहरूका घरको वनावट फुसको छानो र बाँसका भाटाबाट बारबेर गरी निर्मित गरेका हुनाले विजुली, टेलिफोन, धारो आदि सबै सुविधाबाट वञ्चित छन् र नगरउन्मूख छैनन् । जमिन्दारको भूमि (कामत) मा बसोवास गर्ने मुसहरवस्तीहरूमा त आधुनिकीकरणका सुविधाको कल्पना नगर्नु नै उपयुक्त हुन्छ ।

मुसहरहरूको समावेशीकरणको प्रमुख मुद्दा

आजकल नेपालको राजनीतिमा सर्वाधिक चर्चामा आएको शब्दावली "समावेशीकरण" हो । सामान्यतः सामाजिक, आर्थिक, राजनीतिक र भौगोलिक अवस्थामा मूलधारभन्दा टाढा रहेकाहरूलाई समावेश गर्ने प्रक्रियालाई "समावेशीकरण" (Inclusion) भन्दछन् ।

समाजशास्त्री र मानवशास्त्रीहरू भने समावेशीकरणका निमित्त पिछडिएका वर्गहरूको उत्थान र सशक्तिकरणलाई सँगसँगै लिएर जाने कुरा माथि जोड दिन्छन् । यहाँ मुसहरहरूको समावेशीकरणको मुद्दालाई विश्लेषण गर्नको निमित्त सर्वप्रथम दलितहरूको समावेशीकरणको मुद्दालाई सन्दर्भमा लिनु उपयुक्त देखिन्छ ।

दलित समुदायमाथि राज्यको शोषणको माध्यम राज्य प्रशासन नीति र विभेदयुक्त कानून गरी दुई प्रकारबाट भएकोले अहिलेसम्म दलितहरू सामाजिक आर्थिक रुपमा पछाडि परेका हुन् र राष्ट्रिय मूलधारामा समावेश हुन नसकेका हुन् (विश्वकर्मा, विश्वकर्मा, २०६१) । दलितहरूको उत्थानका निमित्त २०५८ सालमा दलित आयोगको गठन भएको छ भने २०६१ मा दलित आरक्षण ऐन पारित भैसकेको छ । राज्यले दलितहरूको उत्थान र विकासका निमित्त लिएको नीतिको कार्यान्वयन पश्चात पनि हालसम्म दलितहरू पिछडिएका र समावेशीकरण प्रक्रियामा आउन सकेका छैनन् । राज्यले दलितहरूको समावेशीकरणको मुद्दालाई डा. हर्क गुरुङद्वारा प्रतिपादित समावेशीकरणको मुद्दा (From exclusion to enclusion by Dr. Harka Gurung, May 2006) अनुरुप निम्नानुसार परिभाषित गरेका छन्-

समावेशीकरणका मुद्दा

सामाजिक समूह	समस्या	मुद्दा
(क) दलित	**सामाजिक** १. जाति विभेद **आर्थिक** १. न्यून साक्षरता २. बेरोजगारी ३. सुकुम्बासी	१. धर्म निरपेक्ष राज्य २. निशुल्क शिक्षा ३. वैकल्पिक जीविकोपार्जनका उपाय ४. जातिगत प्रतिनिधित्व ५. रैथाने र आप्रवासी पहिचान
	राजनैतिक	
	१. नगण्य प्रतिनिधित्व	
	२. नागरिकता समस्या (मधेशीका लागि मात्र)	

स्रोतः- डा. हर्क गुरुङ, २००६ ।

दलितहरूको उत्थान र सशक्तिकरणका लागि राज्यले दलित आयोगको गठन र आरक्षण नीतिको अख्तियारी पछि पनि तराईका दलित मुसहरहरू समावेशीकरण भित्र पर्न नसक्नुका मुख्य कारकहरू र मुद्दाहरूलाई तल चर्चा गरिएको छः

जाति विभेद: दलित र गैर दलित बीच जाति विभेद व्यवहारमा कायमै छ । मुसहर मुसहर बीचमा नै विभेद छ । तिरौतिया मुसहरहरू आफूलाई अन्य मुसहरहरूभन्दा उच्च ठान्दछन् । अन्य मुसहरहरूसँग विहावारी गर्न चाहँदैनन् । त्यसैले मुसहरहको समावेशीकरणका निमित्त सशक्तिकरणको खाँचो छ ।

भूमि: नेपाल सरकारको आरक्षण सम्वन्धी नीति, २०६१ अनुसार भूमिहीनहरूलाई आवासको लागि तराईमा प्रति परिवार ५ कठ्ठा र पहाडमा ४ रोपनी जग्गा प्रदान गर्ने व्यवस्था भएता पनि कार्यान्वयनमा ढिलाई भएका कारणले हालसम्म मुसहरहरू सुकुम्वासी छन् । अध्ययनका लागि समावेश गरिएका ५० घरमुली मुसहरहरूको भू-स्वामित्वको लगत अध्ययनमा देखिए अनुसार ५० घरमुली मुसहरहरू नै भूमिहीन रहेका छन् अर्थात् शतप्रतिशत मुसहरहरू भूमिहीन/सुकुम्वासी छन् । आफ्ना जग्गा जमीन नभएको कारण अधिकांश मुसहरहरू जमीन्दारको जमीन र सरकारी ऐलानी जमीनमा वसोवास गरेका छन् । मुसहरहरूमा वर्गचेतना (class conciousness) नभएका कारण सामन्तवादी भूमि व्यवस्थाप्रतिको उनीहरूको दृष्टिकोण स्पष्ट हुन सकेको छैन ।

नागरिकता: परम्परागत व्यवस्थामा जग्गाको लालपूर्जा (प्रमाण) पेश गर्न नसक्नेहरूले नागरिकता पाउँदैनन् । भूमिहीन मुसहरहरूले जग्गाको लालपूर्जा पेश गर्न सक्ने कुरै आउँदैन ।

अध्ययनमा समावेश भएका ५० घरमुली मुसहरहरू मध्ये ३९ (७७%) घरमुली संख्याले नागरिकता प्राप्त गर्न सकेका छैनन् । नागरिकता प्राप्त गरेको घरमुली संख्या ११ (२२%) ले भने २०१८ सालको विफरको खोपको दाग पाखुरामा हेरेर नागरिकता दिने सरकारी नीति भएको वखत केहीले यस्तो दाग पाखुरामा देखाएर नागरिकता पाएका छन् । त्यस्तै गरी कसैकसैले जग्गाको लालपूर्जा भएको कारण नागरिकता पाएका छन् । ती लालपूर्जा देखाएर नागरिकता लिने मुसहरहरूले पनि पछि आफ्नो नामको जग्गा जमीन विक्री गरी हाल सुकुम्वासी भएका छन् । यसरी वहुसंख्यक मुसहरहरू वेनागरिक भएकाले राज्यविहीन छन् । राज्यविहीनताको अवस्थामा अत्यावश्यक कुराहरू अर्थात् मानव अधिकारका मागहरू राज्य समक्ष प्रस्तुत गर्न सकिरहेका छैनन् ।

हालसालै संसदबाट नागरिकतासम्बन्धी विशेष विधेयक पारित भैसकेको छ आशा छ त्यसले मुसहरहरूको समस्यालाई सम्वोधन गर्न सक्ने छ ।

शिक्षा: सामुदायिक विद्यालयमा निशुल्क शिक्षाको व्यवस्था राज्यवाट गरिए पनि भूमिहीनताका कारण मुसहरहरू अति गरीव छन् । गरीवका कारण जीविकोपार्जनको कठिनाईले गर्दा मुसहरहरूले आफ्ना बालवालिकाहरूलाई विद्यालय पठाउन सकिरहेका छैनन् ।

अध्ययनमा समावेश भएका ५० घर मुसहरहरूका परिवारका ६ वर्षभन्दा माथिका कुल २२९ मुसहरहरूमध्ये १३ (५.७%) मात्र साक्षर छन् भने ठूलो संख्यामा २१६ (९४.३%) मुसहरहरू अशिक्षित छन् । साक्षर हुनेमा पनि पुरुषहरू मात्र पर्छन् । कुल ११६ मुसहर महिलाहरू सवै नै अशिक्षित छन् (हेर्नुहोस् तालिका ३) । यो प्रतिशत नेपालका मुसहर महिलाको शिक्षा ४% (वि.सं. २०५८ को जनगणना अनुरुप) सँग पनि तुलना गर्न नसकिने गरी तल्लो स्तरको छ । अर्थात् यस अध्ययनमा समावेश शतप्रतिशत महिलाहरू अशिक्षित छन् । यसो हुनुमा गरीव र विद्यालयन जान शुरु गरेका मुसहर बालवालिकाहरूको विद्यालय भर्ना एकदमै न्यून रहनु हो ।

रोजगार: सप्तरी जिल्लाको कुल जनसंख्या मध्ये मुसहरहरूको जनसंख्या ५.२१% र फत्तेपुर गा.वि.स. को जनसंख्यामध्ये ६.३४% को रहेको छ । मुसहरहरूलाई समावेशीकरणको निमित्त जनसंख्याको प्रतिशतको आधारमा रोजगारको व्यवस्था हुनु पर्ने हो तर अधिकांश मुसहरहरू वेरोजगार छन् ।

सप्तरी जिल्लाको राजविराज नगरपालिका भनौ वा जिल्ला विकास समितिको कार्यालय, सप्तरी भनौं वा नेपाल सरकारको कुनै पनि कार्यालयमा अध्ययनमा समावेश मुसहरहरू रोजगार (जागिरे) मा छैनन् । अध्ययनमा समावेश ५० घर मुसहर परिवार (१० वर्षभन्दा माथिका) कुल जनसंख्या १९३ मध्ये १४ (७.२५%) जनसंख्या जमिन्दारको घरमा घरेलु नोकरको रुपमा रोजगारी गर्ने वाहेक १७९ (९३.७५%) मुसहरहरू वेरोजगार छन् (हेर्नुहोस् तालिका ६) । निर्णय गर्ने निर्णायक तहमा त परै जाओस् भाँडा माझ्ने तहमा समेत रोजगारीको क्षेत्रमा सहभागी हुन पाएका छैनन् । मुसहरहरूको जीविकोपार्जनको निमित्त राज्यले रोजगारको प्रत्याभूति दिनुपर्छ सो हुन सकिरहेको छैन । यसले गर्दा समावेशीकरण प्रकियामा वाधा उत्पन्न भएको छ ।

राज्यले दलितहरूको समावेशीकरणको मुद्दालाई विश्लेषण गर्दा डा. हर्क गुरुङद्वारा प्रतिपादित समावेशीकरणको मुद्दालाई नै अवलम्वन गरी सम्पूर्ण दलितहरूलाई समान मापदण्ड राखेर विश्लेषण गर्न खोजेको देखिन्छ । यहाँ भन्न खोजिएको कुरा के हो भने दलित शब्द आफैँ मात्र समावेशी हुँदैन । पहाडिया दलितको तुलनामा तराई दलितको सामाजिक-आर्थिक अवस्था एकदमै पिछडिएको छ । उदाहरणको लागि तराई दलितहरूमै पनि धोवी, तत्मा र पासवानहरूको सामाजिक-आर्थिक स्थिति मुसहर, चमार, डुम र हलखोरहरूको भन्दा राम्रो छ । त्यस्तैगरी सामाजिक तहमा दलित पुरुष र महिलाको स्थिति पनि फरक छ । यस अर्थमा मुसहरहरूलाई समावेशीकरण गर्नको निमित्त अन्य दलितहरू सरह समान

मापदण्ड राखेर विश्लेषण गर्ने होइन वरु आदिवासी जनजातिहरूको पाँच तहको समूह वर्गीकरण जस्तै तराई दलितहरूमा पनि समूह वर्गीकरण गरी छुट्टा छुट्टै वा फरक फरक नीति तय गरी मुसहरहरूलाई समावेशीकरणको प्रक्रियामा लैजाने नीति अवलम्बन गरिनु पर्दछ ।

तराई दलित मुसहरहरूको समावेशीकरणको कुरा गर्दा निम्न कुरामा ध्यान दिनु आवश्यक छ:

१. भेदभाव र सामाजिक वहिष्कार दलितहरूको दैनिक नियतिको एउटा अभिन्न अंग बनेको छ । यसैले गैर दलितहरूलाई अलग्गै राखेर समस्या बुभन सकिदैन ।

२. दलितहरू एउटै सांस्कृतिक समूह पनि होइन । दलितहरूकै वीच मतभेदहरू छन् । सामाजिक र आर्थिक दृष्टिकोणले पहाडिया दलितहरू तराई दलितहरूभन्दा माथिल्लो तहमा छन् ।

३. सिङ्गो महिला समूहभित्र दलित महिलाहरू र अभ्र त्यसमा पनि मुसहर महिलाहरूलाई अलग्गै राखेर कसरी हेर्ने ?

निष्कर्ष
तराईका दलितहरू मध्ये दोसो संख्यामा रहेका मुसहरहरू पहाडिया दलितहरू भन्दा सामाजिक र आर्थिक रुपमा अत्यन्त पिछ्छडिएका छन् । मुसहरहरूलाई समावेशीकरणमा आवद्ध गर्नका निमित्त शिक्षा, स्वास्थ्य, नागरिकता, जीविकोपार्जन, भूमि स्वामित्व जस्ता अत्यावश्यक मानवीय कुराहरू र मानव अधिकारलाई राज्यद्वारा प्रत्याभूत गरेपछि समावेशीकरणको पहिलोद्वार खुल्दछ । जनजातिले उठाएको समावेशीकरणको मुद्दा र पहाडिया दलितहरूले उठाएको मुद्दासँग तराई दलितहरूको मुद्दा समान हुन सक्दैन । अभ्र गहिराईमा गएर हेर्ने हो भने तराईकै दलितहरू धोबी, तत्मा र पासीहरूको मुद्दा र मुसहरहरूको मुद्दा समान हुन सक्दैन । त्यस्तै पुरुष मुसहर र महिला मुसहरको समावेशीकरणको मुद्दा एकै हुन सक्दैन किनकि उनीहरूबीचको स्थिति फरक छ । त्यसैले मुसहरहरूको समावेशीकरणको निमित्त उत्थान र सशक्तिकरणका साथै अत्यावश्यक मानवीय आवश्यकता र मानव अधिकारको प्रत्याभूति राज्यद्वारा विशेष मापदण्ड अनुरुप हुनुपर्दछ ।

नोट: यो लेख नेपाल र एशियाली अनुसन्धान केन्द्रबाट आ.व. २०५६/५७ मा संचालित "फत्तेपुर सप्तरीका मुसहरहरू एक अध्ययन" र आ.व. २०५७/०५९ मा संचालित "तराईका बासिन्दाहरूका जातीय इतिहास" (Ethnohistory of Tarai People) विषय अन्तर्गत सप्तरी र सिराहा जिल्लामा वसोवास गर्ने तराईमूलका बासिन्दाहरूको अनुसन्धानमा आधारित हुनुका साथै तथ्याङ्लाई अद्यावधि गर्ने सन्दर्भमा २०६१ सालमा गरिएको स्थलगत अध्ययनसमेत गरी करीव चार महीनाको अवधिमा संकलित तथ्याङ्करूमा आधारित छ ।

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शिव रिजाल

पृष्ठभूमि

दक्षिण एशियाली रंगमन्चका बहुल धारहरू छन् । विविधता यसको प्रमुख विशेषता हो । यस क्षेत्रका विभिन्न धर्म, संस्कृति, जात, समूह, क्षेत्र र समयका प्रदर्शन कलाहरू अनन्तकालदेखि नदीझैं मिसिदै र छुट्टिदै वा आफ्नो अस्तित्व कायम राख्दै आईरहेका छन् । दक्षिण एशियाली रंगमन्चको अर्को विशेषताचाहिँ यहाँका प्रदर्शन कलाहरू (Performing Art) हरूबीच रहेको अन्तर-सम्बन्ध हो । भरतमुनिको नाट्यशास्त्रमा व्याख्या गरिएका नाट्य शैली र तत्त्वहरू यस भेगका शास्त्रीय र लोक साँस्कृतिक प्रदर्शन कलाहरूमा देख्न सकिन्छ । त्यस्तैगरी यस भेगका आधुनिक नाटकहरूमा पश्चिमी र पूर्वीय रंगमन्च शैलीका प्रभाव उत्तिकै मात्रामा देखिन्छन् । भारतीय विद्वान कपिला वात्स्यायनका विचारमा हाम्रा प्रदर्शन कलाहरूलाई पश्चिमीलेझैं फरक फरक बिधा र समूहमा छुट्याउने परम्परा यहाँ पहिले थिएनन् । पश्चिमी शैलीअनुसार यस भेगका कला र साहित्यलाई वर्गीकरण गरेर हामीले हेर्ने गरेको बीसौं शताब्दीदेखि मात्र हो ।[1] यताको जीवनमा धार्मिक र सार्वभौमिक तत्त्वहरू सनातन रूपमा मिलेर रहेकोवाट पनि हाम्रो संस्कृति र कलाको मर्म बुझ्न सकिन्छ । काठमाडौं उपत्यकामा प्राचीन कालदेखि आजसम्म चलिरहेको संस्कृति, कला र जीवनको अन्तर-सम्बन्धलाई मेरी शेफर्ड यसरी लेख्नु हुन्छ । "यहाँ सार्वभौमिक जीवन र धार्मिक संसारमा चल्ने ओहोर दोहोर एउटा दैनिक घटना हो । घरभित्र रहेका स—साना मन्दिर तथा मन्दिरभित्र र त्यसको परिसरमा चल्ने पूजा, विवाह, भोज, गफ र थकाई बिसाउने स्थलको रूपमा उक्त स्थानको प्रयोग भएको देख्दा यहाँको कला र जीवन दुवैमा सार्वभौमिक र धार्मिकजगतबीचको सन्तुलन देखिन्छ" (१२८) ।[2] यसवाट हामीले आधुनिक समयमा धार्मिक, साहित्यिक र कलात्मक भनी तानिएका समीक्षात्मक र संरचनात्मक रेखाहरूको पुनर्मूल्याङ्कन गर्नु पर्ने देखिन्छ । प्राचीन र मध्यकालदेखि चलिआएका कला र संस्कृतिले हाम्रो समयमा कला सम्बन्धमा रहेको सीमित दृष्टिलाई फराकिलो बनाउन मद्दत गर्छ ।

ईशाको अठारौं शताब्दीको पाँचौ दशकदेखि नै पश्चिमी शैलीका वन्द रंगमन्च र अँग्रेजी नाटकहरूको मन्चन भारतको कलकत्ता, मद्रास र मुम्बईमा हुन थालिसकेको थियो । आरम्भमा यस्ता रंगमन्च अँग्रेजहरूले इष्ट इन्डिया कम्पनीको मातहतका अँग्रेजहरूलाई अँग्रेजी नाटक देखाउनको निम्ति खोलेका थिए । दक्षिण एशियाली रंगमन्चमा यो एउटा महत्त्वपूर्ण घटना भएर रह्यो । पश्चिमी शैलीमा गरिने नाट्य परम्पराको प्रवेश दक्षिण एशियामा त्यस बेलाको अँग्रेज साम्राज्य रहेका भारतका प्रमुख शहरहरूवाट शुरु भयो । त्यसपर्छि पश्चिमेली रंगमन्च पश्चिमेली शैलीको

कला र जीवन अनुभव र अनुकरण गर्न चाहन्थे । विश्वविद्यालय पढेका, अंग्रेजी
भाषामा शिक्षित, उच्च र मध्यमवर्गका शहरिया बीच लोकप्रिय भयो । यसरी दक्षिण
एशियाली रंगमन्चमा एउटा महत्वपूर्ण अन्तर-साँस्कृतिक घटना घट्यो । यसले
कालान्तरमा आएर यस भेगका प्रदर्शन कलामा नयाँ मोडहरू लिएर आयो । हालको
दक्षिण एशियाली रंगमन्चमा देखापरेका गतिविधिहरूलाई यही पृष्ठभूमिमा हेर्नु पर्दछ ।

पश्चिमी रंगमन्च र नाट्य शैली यस भेगमा बिस्तारै लोकप्रिय हुन भन्दा निकै
अगाडि नै नाट्यशास्त्रीय शैलीमा भारतका क्षेत्रीय भाषाहरूमा सँगीत प्रधान
नाटकहरू लेखिदै थिए । संस्कृत भाषा र संस्कृतिले आफ्नो अन्तिम चरणमा आएर
यस भेगका क्षेत्रीय भाषा र संस्कृतिमा आफ्ना चिन्ह छोड्यो । नेमिचन्द्र जैनका
विचारमा सँगीत प्रधान भएको नाट्य परम्परा भारतमा भण्डै एक हजार वर्षसम्म
रह्यो र उन्नाइसौं शताब्दीमा आएर पश्चिमेली, खासगरी अंग्रेजी नाट्य शैली र
नाट्य परम्परासँग भएको यिनको जम्काभेटले यस भेगका रंगमन्चमा नयाँ किसिमको
परिवर्तन ल्यायो । सँगीत प्रधान भन्दा पनि सम्वाद प्रधान भएका, भण्डै
शेक्सपियरका नाट्य शैलीमा लेखिएका नाटकहरू भारतका विभिन्न क्षेत्रीय
भाषाहरूमा लेखिन र मंचन हुनथाले ।[3] हाल आएर हाम्रा रंगमन्चहरू अतियथार्थवादी
भए, हामीले आफ्नै प्रदर्शन कलाका परम्पराभित्र रहेर नयाँ खोजी गर्नु पर्छ, आधुनिक
बन्द रंगमन्चको माध्यमबाट हाम्रा पारम्परिक प्रदर्शन कलाको विकास वा उत्थान
गर्नुपर्दछ, हामीले यस देश र भेगको राजनैतिक, आर्थिक र सामाजिक परिप्रेक्षमा
हाम्रो जीवनको नाटकीकरण गर्न रंगमन्चको प्रयोग गर्नु पर्दछ इत्यादि किसिमका
सम्वाद ("डिस्कोर्ष") हरू पूर्वीय र पश्चिमेली रंगमन्चको भेटले अस्तित्वमा आएका
रंगमंचीय प्रवृत्तिहरू हुन् ।

यस लेखमा हाल दक्षिण एशियाली देशहरू मुख्यत: भारतमा देखिएका विभिन्न
रंगमंचीय प्रवृत्तिहरूको ब्याख्या र वर्तमान नेपाली रंगमन्चमा भएका गतिविधि र गर्नु
पर्ने काम बारे केही चर्चा उठाउने प्रयास गरिने छ ।

समकालीन भारतीय रंगमंच

सर्वप्रथम, समकालीन भारतीय रंगमन्चका प्रवृत्तिहरू बारे कुरा गर्दा आधुनिक
भारतका क्षेत्रीय भाषा र रंगमन्च वंगाली, हिन्दी, मराठी, तेलगु र मलयालम आदिका
अस्तित्वलाई स्वीकार गर्नुपर्दछ । भारतका विभिन्न प्रान्त र भाषाका रंगमन्चमा नौला
प्रयोगहरू भईरहेका छन् । भारतीय रंगमन्च हिन्दीमात्र होइन । प्रजातान्त्रिक भारतको
रंगमन्च हेर्दा हामीले देख्ने कुरा के हो भने एउटा राज्यमा रहेका विभिन्न भाषा र
संस्कृति अन्तर्गतका रंगमन्चहरूको विकास हुनु आवश्यक मात्र होइन यसले त्यस
देशको कला र संस्कृतिलाई एउटा गरिमामय स्थान पनि प्रदान गर्छ ।

मलयालम भाषामा संस्कृत नाट्यशैलीमा नाटक लेख्ने र निर्देशन गर्ने कवलम
नारायण पनिक्करको कामलाई विश्व रंगमन्चका अध्ययन र *खोज* गर्नेहरूले ठूलो
महत्वका साथ हेर्छन् । संस्कृत नाटककार *भास* र कालिदासका नाटकहरूको मंचन
गरेर उनले नाट्यशास्त्र पद्धतिबाट रंगमन्च गर्नु भनेको के हो त्यसलाई प्रस्ट पारेका

छन् । सन् साठी र सत्तरीको दशकमा भारतमा आएको *आफैतिर फर्कौ* ("back to the
roots") भन्ने रंगमन्च सम्बन्धी चेतनालाई पनि पनिक्करको कामबाट हेर्न सकिन्छ ।
*कुट्टियाट्टम्*लाई संस्कृत वा नाट्यशास्त्रमा आधारित रंगमन्चको सबभन्दा नजिकको
शैली मानिन्छ र मलयालम्लाई संस्कृत भाषाको सबभन्दा नजिकको भाषा मानिन्छ ।
पनिक्करले यी दुबै माध्यमबाट प्राचीन समयदेखि चलिआएको नाट्यशास्त्रमा
आधारित नाट्य शैलीको पुनरुत्थान गर्ने काम गरेका छन् । उनको विचारमा
नाट्यशास्त्रले प्रतिपादन गरेको शैलीमा नाटक प्रस्तुत् गर्दा, संस्कृत नाटकको मंचन
गर्दा वा त्यही शैलीमा रंगमन्चन गर्दा दृश्य काव्यको सृजना हुन्छ, रंगमन्चमा देखिने
दृश्य हेर्दा र सुन्दा पनि ती कविता जस्ता लाग्छन् जसले गर्दा रंगमन्च प्रदर्शन वा
प्रदर्शन पक्षमाथि केन्द्रित हुन्छ । यसकोलागि नाट्य–लेखन पनि काव्यात्मक हुनु
पर्दछ । यो एक प्रकारले सीमितता हो तर यसलाई चुनौति को रूपमा नलिई हामीले
यस किसिमको रंगमन्च बुभ्न वा सृजना गर्न सक्दैनौ ।[4] आधुनिक वा उत्तरआधुनिक
समयमा आएर नाटक अति सम्वादात्मक भयो । रंगमन्चमा रंगमन्चकै भाषाको खोजी
हुनुपर्दछ भन्ने, *एभाँ गार्द* ढंगवाट काम गर्न रुचाउने रँगकर्मीहरूलाई पनिक्करको
कामको ठूलो महत्व छ । अर्को कुरा साँस्कृतिक रंगमन्चको कलेवर रँगकर्मीको शरीर
र छ्यालामा कुँदिएर बसेको हुन्छ । एउटा प्रर्दशनीय कलाको महत्व बुभ्न र नयाँ
शैलीको रंगमन्चन गर्न साँस्कृतिक प्रदर्शन कलाको अध्ययन गर्नुपर्छ भन्ने हालका
पश्चिमेली रंगसमीक्षक, अनुसन्धानकर्ता र रंगकर्मीहरूलाई पनिक्करको कामले
अन्तर-साँस्कृतिक रंगमन्च बुभ्न निकै सहयोग गरेको छ । फिलिप जारिलीका
विचारमा तथाकथित पश्चिमी मूलधार रंगमन्चका अनुसार अभिनय, पात्र सिर्जना,
सम्वाद र अरु रंगकर्म गर्नेहरूलाई पूर्वीय, खास गरी भारतीय रंगमन्चका शैलीले
रंगमन्चप्रति नयाँ सोच र 'अर्को' दृष्टिकोण राख्ने परिपाटीको सृजना गरिदियो ।[5]
समकालीन भारतीय रंगमन्चले यस उपमहाद्वीपमा मात्रै होइन पश्चिमी कला र
जगतमा पनि प्रभाव सृजना गर्न सकेको छ ।

एकातिर आफ्नै नाट्य परम्पराको बिकास र पुनरुत्थान हुनु पर्छ भन्ने भारतीय
नाट्यकर्मीहरू छन् भने अर्कोतिर यथार्थवादी नाटक शैलीलाई नै प्रयोग गरी देश,
काल अनुसारका राजनैतिक र सामाजिक समस्या र परिस्थितिलाई सम्बोधन गर्ने
खालका नाटक पनि लेखिदैछन् । यथार्थवादी शैलीमा नाटक लेखेर हिन्दी नाटक वा
आधुनिक भारतीय रंगमन्चलाई एउटा गरिमामय स्थान दिलाउन सक्ने मोहन
राकेशको *आधेअधुरे* जस्तो नाट्य कृतिले वर्तमान भारतीय नाटक/रंगमन्चलाई नयाँ
मोड दिईरहेको छ । सुरेश अवस्थीका विचारमा यस्ता खाले रंगमन्च शैलीमा काम
गर्ने निर्देशकहरूले अहिलेको भारतीय रंगमन्चमा राम्रो काम गरेर देखाएका छन् ।
अमाल अल्लाना उनको विचारमा एउटा समकालीन सफल र कुशल यथार्थवादी
ढंगले रंगमन्च गर्ने निर्देशक हुन् । त्यस्तैगरी हिन्दी रंगमन्चका रजिन्दर नाथ र एम
के रैना कहिलेकहीं प्रयोगवादी शैलीमा काम गरेपनि यी यथार्थवादी रंगमन्चन नै
गर्छन् ।[6]

मराठी भाषामा यथार्थवादी धारमा नाटक लेखेर रंगमन्चलाई अति लोकप्रिय पार्ने नाटककारहरूमा विजय तेन्दुलकर, वसन्त कानेटकर, जयन्त दाल्भी, महेश अल्कुन्चवर र सतीश आलेकर पर्दछन् र यी यदाकदा प्रयोगवादी शैलीमा पनि नाटक लेख्छन् । यसरी यथार्थवादी धार भित्रै रहेर गरेको प्रयोगवादी कामले भारतमा यथार्थवादी नाट्य–लेखन र प्रस्तुतिलाई समयसापेक्ष, बलियो र रचनात्मक ढंगले अगाडि बढाएको छ । तापस सेनले बन्द रंगमन्च अथवा प्रोसेनियम् रंगमन्चलाई प्रकाश (Lights) परिचालनमा नयाँ शैलीद्वारा सशक्त बनाउने काम गरे । शम्भु मित्रले यथार्थवादी रंगमन्च वा नाटकलाई पनि प्रयोगवादी शैलीमा उतारेर सामाजिक समस्यालाई सवल ढंगले प्रस्तुत वा सम्बोधन गर्न सकिन्छ भन्ने देखाए । यी सबै भारतीय रंगकर्मीहरूको काम, विचार र प्रस्तुति हेर्दा के देखिन्छ भने आधुनिक बन्द रंगमन्चलाई अगाडि बढाउँदै लगेको यो परम्परा पनि समकालीन भारतीय रंगमन्चको एउटा बलियो पक्ष हो । अनुराधा कपुरको विचारमा भानु भारती, मोहन राकेश र विजय तेन्दुलकरका नाटकहरूले भारतको राष्ट्रिय जीवनमा छाएका निराशा, भ्रष्टाचार, शोषण र मध्यमवर्गीय परिवारमा छाएको आडम्बर, चिन्ता र समस्यालाई राम्ररी नाटकीकरण गर्दछन् ।[7]

त्यस्तैगरी भारतीय रंगमन्चमा सन् साठी र सत्तरीको दशकमा आएको नयाँ सोच *आफैँ तिर फर्कौं* ("back to the roots") ले हालसम्म पनि भारतीय रंगमन्चलाई अग्रगति दिइराखेको छ । यस सन्दर्भमा रतन थियाम् र गिरीश कर्नाडको कामलाई विशेष महत्त्वका साथ हेरिन्छ । रतन थियाम्को *चक्रव्यूह* सन् २००० मा नेपाल राजकीय प्रज्ञाप्रतिष्ठानमा प्रदर्शन हुँदा हेर्ने मौका पाइएको थियो । थियाम्ले यस नाटकबाट भारतीय राष्ट्रिय राजनीतिको समस्या प्रस्तुत गरेका थिए भने अर्को महत्त्वपूर्ण कुरा उनले त्यस नाटक प्रस्तुतिमा मणिपुरी लोकशैलीका शारीरिक अभ्यास, कुस्ती र खेलका भाव भंगिमाहरूलाई अभिनयात्मक र निकै कलात्मक ढंगमा प्रस्तुत् गरेका थिए । अर्को अर्थमा उनले लोकशैलीका प्रदर्शन कलाका तत्वहरू प्रयोग गरेर एउटा दृश्य काव्यको सृजना गर्ने प्रयास गरेका थिए । उनका शब्दमा, उक्त प्रस्तुतिमा मणिपुरको "मार्सल् आर्ट" र अरु किसिमका खेल जस्तै वारिलिवा, नाता संस्कृतन र छोलामलाई *चक्रव्यूह*मा प्रयोग गरिएको थियो ।[8] गिरीश कर्नाड पनि लोक शैलीमा रहेर आधुनिक नाटक लेख्छन् तर उनी थियाम्को जस्तो दृश्य काव्य सृजना गर्नु भन्दा पनि मानवीय पीडा र सम्वेदनालाई लोकशैलीका नाट्य र रंगमन्चीय शैली प्रयोग गरेर सूक्ष्म ढंगमा व्यक्त गर्ने कोशीस गर्छन् । उनको *नाग मण्डल* लोकशैलीमा लेखिएको नाटक हो । लोकशैलीको प्रयोग गर्दा कर्नाड अधिरंगमन्चीय अथवा "मेटाथिएटर" जनित चेतनाको सृजना गर्छन् । *नागमण्डल*मा यथार्थवादी परम्परामा नाटक लेखेर दर्शकको "नीदं हराम्" गर्ने एउटा नाटककार नै नाटकको मुख्य पात्र छ र कथा भन्ने अर्को पात्रसंगको उसको भेटले स्वयं उसैलाई नै रंगमन्च सम्बन्धी निकै ज्ञान हुन्छ । कर्नाडका शब्दमा भन्ने हो भने हामी आधुनिक, शहरीया, पश्चिमी जीवन र कलाका पारखीहरूले मान्नै पर्ने एउटा कुरा के हो भने पारम्परिक र लोकशैलीका नाट्य–लेखन र रंगमन्च शैलीले हामीलाई "टेक्निकल

फ्रिडम" अथवा माध्यमको स्वतन्त्रता दिन्छ ।[9] अहिले स्वतन्त्र भारतका रंगकर्मी र नाटककारहरूले गर्न खोजेको पनि यही हो । यसरी *आफैँतिर फर्कौं* (back to the roots) रंगमन्च चेतनाले भारतीय रंगमन्चमा नयाँ सम्वाद र सिर्जनाका लहरहरू खोली दिएको छ ।

भारतीय नारीवादी महिला नाटककार र रंगकर्मीहरूका सृजनाहरूलाई समकालीन भारतीय रंगमन्चको अर्को सवल पक्षको रूपमा लिन सकिन्छ । अनुराधा कपुर जो स्वयं समकालीन भारतीय रंगमन्चकी एक सफल निर्देशक हुनुहुन्छ, भन्नुहुन्छ, गएको १५ वर्ष यता भारतीय नारी नाटककार र निर्देशकहरूका कामले हाम्रो ध्यान नारी सम्वेदना र समस्या उजागर गर्न नयाँ संरचनाको खोजी हुनुपर्छ भन्ने तिर खिंचेको छ । प्राचीन कालदेखि चलिआएकाले सबै कुरा सत्य हुन् भन्ने पुरुषवादी संस्कारको विनिर्माण हुनुपर्छ भन्ने कुरामा उनी विश्वाश राख्दछिन् ।[10] एउटा उदाहरणको रूपमा मिरा कान्तले लेखेको *नेपथ्य राग* भन्ने नाटकलाई लिन सकिन्छ । उक्त नाटकको प्रस्तुति हेर्ने अवसर यस लेखकलाई *छैठौं भारत रंग महोत्सव*मा प्राप्त भएकोथियो । प्रस्तुतिको हिसाबले खासै उत्कृष्ट नभएता पनि उक्तनाटकले उठाएको विषय वस्तुले हाल भारतीय रंगमन्चमा नारीवादी रंगकर्मी र नाटकहरूले राखेका विचारको प्रतिनिधित्व गर्दछ जस्तो मलाई लाग्छ । चौथों र पाँचौं शताब्दीमा उज्जयिनी भन्ने राज्यमा राजा चन्द्रगुप्त विक्रमादित्यको शासन कालमा खाना भन्ने प्रथम महिला खगोलशास्त्री हुन्छिन् । राजा चन्द्रगुप्त उनको शक्ति देखेर चकित हुन्छन् र खानालाई राजकाज/शाही-सभाको सदस्यता दिने विचार गर्छन् । अरु पुरुष सदस्यहरू वा नवरत्नहरूलाई यो कुरा मन पर्दैन । त्यसकारण खानाले जिब्रो काटिन् भने मात्र राजसभाको सदस्य हुन पाउँछे भन्ने उनीहरू निर्णय सुनाउँछन् । नाटकले हाम्रो यस क्षेत्रमा नारीले भोगेका पीडालाई हाम्रो इतिहासको शुरुका दिनतिर लगेर नव-ऐतिहासिकतावादबाट नारी समस्याको नाटकीकरण गरेको छ । खानाले भोगेको पीडाकै पुनरावृत्ति हुन् अहिलेका यस भेगका नारी समस्याहरू । नाटकको सन्देश यस्तै थियो । त्यस्तैगरी निलममान सिंह चौधरी, उषा गांगुली, अनुराधा कपुर र अनामिका हक्सरका नाटक र निर्देशनले समकालीन भारतीय रंगमन्चलाई अग्रगति दिएको छ ।

समकालीन भारतीय रंगमन्चको अर्को धार भनेको किनारामा रहेकाहरूको जीवन र समस्याको नाटकीकरण गर्ने शैलीको विकास वा यस सम्बन्धमा लेखिएका नाटकलाई लिनु पर्छ । उषा गांगुलीले माहाश्वेता देवीको उपन्यास *रुदाल्लीलाई* नाटकीकरण गरेको कामले दलितमा पनि महिला वर्गले भोग्नु परेका पीडाको नाटकीकरण गर्दछ । त्यस्तैगरी त्रिपुरारी शर्माले कुष्ठरोगीका पीडामाथि लेखेको नाटक *द उड्रेन काट्ले* किनारामा रहेकाहरूको पीडा व्यक्त गर्न नयाँ संरचनाको खोजी गरेको छ । यसले हालको समकालीन भारतीय रंगमन्चलाई थप दिशा प्रदान गरेको छ ।

वादल सरकारको *तृतीय रंगमन्च* भन्ने सिद्धान्तलाई पनि भारतीय रंगकर्मीहरूले लिएको एउटा धारको रूपमा लिन सकिन्छ । सरकारका विचारमा बन्द रंगमन्च

शहरकेन्द्रित हुन्छ भने लोकपरम्पराको रंगमन्च वा प्रदर्शन कला गाउँकेन्द्रित हुन्छ । सरकारको विचारमा यी दुइ बीच एउटा ठूलो दुरी छ । शहरीया रंगमन्च भारतीयहरूको नितान्त आफ्नै चाहिं होइन । पश्चिमी शैलीको विधान र नाट्य परम्पराले गर्दा यसले हाम्रो जीवनका जटिल पाटाहरू मुखरित गर्न सक्दैन । त्यस्तैगरी हाम्रा गाँउघरका प्रदर्शन कलाहरू जीवन्त छन् तर यिनले समसमयिक जीवनलाई त्यति समेट्न सकिरहेका छैनन् । त्यसकारण, सरकारको विचारमा दुवैखाले रंगमन्चका राम्रा पक्षहरू लिएर हामीले तेश्रो खालको रंगमन्च पद्धतिको विकास गर्न सक्नुपर्दछ ।[11] सरकार आफैंमा एउटा सफल नाटककार र निर्देशक हुन् । उनले प्रस्तुत गरेको तेश्रो रंगमन्चको विचार कतिपय सवालमा आलोचित भएता पनि यसमा समकालीन भारतीय रंगकर्मीले हाम्रो जीवन र रंगमन्च सम्बन्धमा राखेको चिन्ता झल्किन्छ ।

समकालीन भारतीय रंगमन्चबारे बुझ्नका लागि अलग धारको रंगमन्च ("alternative theatre") को अवधारणाले काम गर्दै आएका समकालीन भारतीय रंगमन्चका पद्धति र शैलीहरूलाई बुझ्नु पर्दछ जस्तो मलाई लाग्दछ । यस्ता अलग धार भनिने रंगमन्च प्रस्तुतिका पद्धति प्रत्येक रंगकर्मीले गर्ने कामअनुसार फरक फरक हुन्छन् । अलगधारमा रहेर बस्नु भनेको नयाँ किसिमवाट रंगमन्च सृजना गर्नु हो । यस लेखकले हेर्न पाएका अलगधारका रंगमन्च प्रस्तुतिहरू *द साउन्ड अफ साइलेन्स* (छैठौं *भारत रंग महोत्सव*) र *तृतीय युद्ध र जात्रा पथ* (प्रथम *विदेशीय रंगोत्सव, नेपाल*) मध्ये पहिलो "एथ्लेटिक्स", "एकोबाटिक्स" र "एस्थेटिक" ढंगमा नाट्यशास्त्रीय शैली र पारम्परिक भारतीय रंगमन्च पद्धति कलरिपट्टी (यसलाई संस्कृत रंगमन्चको नजिकको शैली मानिन्छ) मा प्रस्तुत गरिएको थियो । यसमा कुनै शब्दको प्रयोग भएको थिएन । यसको प्रस्तुति कलात्मक र सुन्दर ढंगको थियो । यसका निर्देशक मधु गोपीनाथ र वाक्केम संजीवकाअनुसार *द साउन्ड अफ साइलेन्सले* ध्वनि, पाद, शरीर र आत्मा, आधुनिकता र परम्परावीचको नितान्त नौलो सम्वाद प्रस्तुत गर्छ । यसका संगीतकार र नृत्यकारहरूको खोजी भनेको पृथ्वीशक्ति र जीवनशक्तिमा अन्तर्निहित द्वन्द र सुन्दरता हो ।[13] त्यस्तैगरी प्रोविर गुहाका *जात्रा पथ र तृतीय युद्ध* सम्पूर्ण रूपमा भारतीय पारम्परिक शैलीका नृत्य र रंगमन्चमा आधारित प्रस्तुति थिएनन् । तिनमा प्रयोग गरिएका संगीत कुनै शास्त्रीय स्तरका नभएर बरु प्लास्टिकको कर्कस स्वर थोत्रो घडी र टीनको दिक्कलाग्दो आवाज र ड्रमसेट्को त्यस्तै ध्वनि थियो । गुहाको प्रस्तुतिको मुख्य उद्देश्य भनेको यस भेगमा विश्व-भौगोलिकीकरण र साम्राज्यवादले उठाएका समस्याहरूको नाटकीकरण गर्नु थियो । यी प्रस्तुतिले समसामयिकता झल्काउने लक्षणाहरू जस्तै G 8, कोकाकोला र अरु भूमण्डलीकरणका सूचकहरू पनि प्रयोग गरेका थिए । गुहाको विचारमा हाम्रा समस्याहरू भनेका गरीबी र शोषण हुन् जस्लाई सम्वोधन नगर्ने कलाको कुनै भविष्य छैन ।[13]

भारतीय रंगमन्चलाई यस मोडसम्म ल्याउने कामहरूमध्ये विदेशी नाटकलाई अनुदित गरेर अन्तर-सांस्कृतिक ढंगबाट मंचन गर्ने शैलीलाई पनि लिनु पर्दछ । सन्

१९५८मा शम्भु मित्रले हेन्रिक् इब्सेनको *ए डल्स हाउस*लाई *पुतुल खेला* नाम दिएर बंगाली भाषामा बंगाली संस्कृति झल्काउने लक्षणाको प्रयोग गरेर एउटा नयाँ सम्वादको शुरुवात गरे । त्यस समयका दर्शकको मन छुन सक्ने विषयवस्तु र पात्रहरू भएको त्यो नाटकमा उनले पात्रपात्राहरूको नाम र परिस्थिति मिलाउने क्रिसमसको सट्टा लक्ष्मीपूजा (पूजा फेस्टिवल) र त्यही चाड झल्काउने नाच र गीतको पनि प्रयोग गरे (साभार शम्भु मित्र २०३) ।[14] शम्भु मित्रले बहुरूपी नाट्य समूहका लागि गरेको यस कामले भारतीय रंगमन्चमा नयाँ चेतना ल्यायो । बहुरूपीले यो प्रदर्शन भारतका विभिन्न ठाऊमा प्रदर्शन गर्दै हिंड्नु भन्दा निकै अगाडि, रंगमन्च समीक्षक कीर्ति जैनको विचारमा, चालीसको दशकदेखिनै भारतीय रंगमन्चमा इब्सेनको प्रभावले नयाँ चेतनाको लहर ल्याइदियो, भाषामा परिवर्तन आयो, नयाँ किसिमका पात्रहरूको सृजना हुन थाल्यो र रंगमन्चको भाषामानै नयाँ परिवर्तन आयो ।[14] त्यस्तैगरी वि. भि. करनाथले १९७९मा नेशनल स्कूल अफ् ड्रामाको रेपर्टरीसंग मिलेर शेक्सपियरको *म्याक्वेथ* भन्ने नाटक हिन्दीमा *यक्षगानाको* नाट्य शैलीमा प्रस्तुत गरे । यसरी जनजातीय रूपमा रहेको प्रदर्शनकारी लोक रंगमन्च *यक्षगानाको* प्रयोग गरेर काम गर्दा भारतीय लोकपरम्पराका नाट्य शैलीको शक्ति उजागर भयो । सुरेश अवस्थीका विचारमा संगीत र नृत्यको प्रयोग गरिएको करनाथको यस रचनाले भारतीय रंगमन्चमा सृजनाका नयाँ लहरहरू ल्यायो । उक्त नाटक भारतका अरु विभिन्न स्थानीय भाषामा पनि प्रदर्शन भयो र यसबाट प्रसस्त मात्रामा नयाँ कामको शुरुवात भयो ।[16] मुख्य कुरा, यस्ता अन्तर-सांस्कृतिक नाट्य प्रस्तुतिले हाम्रा पारम्परिक प्रदर्शनकलाका महत्त्व र शक्तिको वोध गरायो । *आफैं तिर फर्कौं* भन्ने नारालाई साठी र सत्तरीका दशकमा भारतीय रंगमन्चमा ल्याउन र सफल बनाउन यी अन्तर-सांस्कृतिक नाट्य प्रस्तुतिले सहयोग गरे । यस प्रकारको नाट्य परम्परा हाले सम्पन्न छैठौं भारतीय रंग महोत्सवमा पनि देखियो । जर्मन उपन्यासकार हर्मन हेशेको *सिद्धार्थ* भन्ने उपन्यासलाई मलयालम् भाषामा त्यहाँको स्थानीय रंगमन्च शैलीमा नाटकीय रूपान्तरण गरेर प्रस्तुत गरिएको थियो । त्यस्तैगरी शेक्सपियरको *म्याक्वेथको* केही प्रमुख अंशहरूलाई मिलाएर *मिष्टर एण्ड मिसेज् म्याक्वेथको* नाममा पपेट्री अथवा पुतलीको नाच र अरु लोक सांस्कृतिक लक्षणाको प्रयोग गरेर मन्चन भएको थियो ।

समकालीन भारतीय रंगमन्चको अर्को धार भनेको सडक नाटक हो । मार्टिन चौतारीले आयोजना गरेको छलफल कार्यक्रममा माला हाश्मीले गत २००२ जुन महीनामा भनेअनुसार हाल भारतमा हजारौं सडक नाटक समूहले दैनिक रूपमा नाट्य मंचन गर्छन् ।[17] प्रायःजसो ती सामाजिक समस्यामा आधारित हुन्छन् । भारतीय सडक नाटकको इतिहासमा महत्त्वपूर्ण योगदान दिने शफ्दर हाश्मीको हत्या सन् १९८९ मा नाटक देखाँउदादेखाँउदै भएको थियो । उनका विचारमा सडक नाटक खास अर्थमा भन्ने हो भने सवैखाले पुराना वा पारम्परिक शैलीका प्रदर्शनीय कलाभन्दा भिन्न हुनु पर्छ किनभने यसको उत्पत्ति नितान्त आधुनिक समाज र समस्या, जस्तै आर्थिक शोषण, मजदुर समस्या आदिसंग छ । यस्तो खाले

रंगमन्चलाई हामीले पारम्परिक रंगमन्चको कलेवरभित्र घुसाउनु भन्दा पनि ब्रेख्त र पिस्कार्टरको शैलीमा अगाडि बढाउन सक्नुपर्छ ।[१६] सडक नाटकको मुद्रा भनेको नितान्त आधुनिक समाजमा रहेको समसामयिक समस्या नै हो । यसलाई अनेक शास्त्रीय पढ्तिमा ढालेर होइन, सोझो र सरल तरीकाले फ्याट्ट भन्नुपर्दछ भन्ने सफ्दर हाश्मीको विचारलाई एउटा नितान्त सडक रंगमन्चको पहरेदारको रूपमा लिन सकिन्छ । समकालीन भारतीय रंगमन्चले लिएको अर्को धार बारे अब तलका पंक्तिहरूमा प्रयास गरिएको छ ।

यथार्थवादी शैलीको विनिर्माण

समकालीन भारतीय रंगमन्चमा आएको अर्को धार भनेको यथार्थवादी शैलीको विनिर्माण हो । विशेषगरी औपनिवेशिकोत्तर रंगमन्चको खोजीको क्रममा भएका कामहरूमा कथालाई कथाको रूपमानै मन्चन गर्नुलाई लिनसकिन्छ । यसले रंगमन्चलाई यथार्थवादबाट मात्रै हेर्ने एकलबादको विनिर्माण गर्छ । देवराज अंकुरले सन् १९७५ मा *कहानीका रंगमन्च*मार्फत् यस कामको शुरुवात गरे । निर्मल वर्माका तीन छोटा कथाहरू लिएर *तीन एकान्त* भन्ने शीर्षक दिई उनले यो प्रयोग गरे । त्यसपछि उनले कथा र उपन्यासलाई जस्ताको त्यस्तै खासै नाटकीकरण, दृश्य र परिधान प्रयोग नगरी साधरणतया ब्ल्किड्ग्सबाट मात्रै काम गरे । सुरेश अवस्थीका अनुसार अंकुर प्राय:जसो दुई वा तीनवटा कथाहरू लिन्छन् र तिनलाई एउटा शीर्षक दिएर प्रदर्शित गर्छन् । यस्तोखाले रंगमन्च शैलीको लोकप्रियताले गर्दा नयाँ पुस्ताका रंगकर्मीले त्यसरी नै यथार्थवादी ढंगबाट भन्दा पर रही, धेरै नाटकीकरण नगरिकनै कथालाई कथाकै रूपमा मंचन गर्न शुरु गरेका छन् ।[१९] यस्ता नवीन शैलीका प्रयोगले गर्दा रंगमन्च बुझ्ने नयाँ अवसरहरू उजागर भए ।

लोकशैली नाट्य

त्यस्तैगरी लोकशैलीका नाटक र रंगमन्चलाई आधुनिक बन्द रंगमन्चमा प्रस्तुत गर्ने शैलीले पनि समकालीन भारतीय रंगमन्चलाई थप उर्जा दिएको छ । सबैले पारसी नाटक भनेर नाक खुम्च्याउने परिपाटीलाई अन्त्य गर्दै पारसी नाटक *यहूदी की लड्की* छैठौ भारत रंग महोत्सवमा प्रस्तुत भयो र यो सबभन्दा चर्चाको विषय भयो । यसबाट यो स्पष्ट हुन्छ कि प्रत्येक किसिमको नाटक अथवा रंगमन्चको आफ्नै विशेषता हुन्छ र त्यसलाई समय सापेक्ष रुपमा बदलिरहनु पर्दछ । एकसय पचास वर्ष पुरानो नाट्यशैली पारसी रंगमन्च एकाएक बीचमा हराएर यसपालीको रंग महोत्सवमा देखिँदा सबैजनाले एउटा नयाँ अनुभव पाएँ । ६ वर्षदेखि लगातार रंग महोत्सव गर्दै आएको राष्ट्रीय नाट्य विद्यालयले यो अति राम्रो काम गऱ्यो । शिव प्रकाश मिश्र लेख्छन्- यो नाटक यस महोत्सवको एउटा प्रमुख आकर्षण नै रह्यो ।[२०] देवेन्द्रराज अंकुर लेख्छन्, आफ्नो मंचनको लागि यो नाटकले कुनै तामझाम खालको कलेवरको माग गर्दैन । सीधै अभिनेताको अभिनय एवं चरित्र चित्रणद्वारा यस नाटकले एउटा गहिराइ लिन्छ र पारसी रंगमन्चले दिने भावात्मक असर पनि

छोड्छ । नाटक यथार्थबादी ढंगबाट सत्यको खोजी पनि गर्छ ।[२१] पारसी रंगमन्चको प्रभाव दक्षिण एशियाली मुलुकहरूमा लगभग एउटै समय सन् १८५० देखि शुरु भयो र यसै नाट्य परम्परालाई अध्ययनक्षेत्र बनाउनुभएकी अनुराधा कपुरको विचारमा पारसी रंगमन्चले विभिन्न मन्च सजावट र परिधानका माध्यमबाट आदर्श पुरुषहरू जस्तै देव, देवता र अन्य पात्रहरूको जीवनलाई त्यही प्रकारको कलेवरमा प्रस्तुत् गर्ने शैलीको विकास गऱ्यो । अलौकिक जगत र पात्रहरूलाई अचम्म लाग्ने धार्मिक र सार्वभौमिक दुवै खालका लक्षणाहरूबाट मन्चमा उतार्ने चुनौती लिए पारसी रंगकर्मीहरूले । रंगमन्चमा प्राय आश्चर्यजनक घटनामा आधारित कथाहरू मन्चित भए ।[२२] त्यस्तैगरी नाटककार गिरिश कर्नाडको भनाईमा पारसी रंगमन्चले हालको वलिउड् फिल्म उद्योगलाई यसको स्थापनाकालमा ठूलो सहयोग गऱ्यो । यस रंगमन्चमा प्रयोगमा आएका परिधान र चरित्रलक्षणा वा विम्वहरू नै शुरुका हिन्दी अथवा अरु चलचित्रहरूमा प्रयोग भए । पारसी रंगमन्चले त्यस बेलाको प्रदर्शन सँस्कृतिलाई नयाँ मोड दियो (की नोट स्पिच) ।[२३]

समकालीन भारतीय रंगमन्चको चर्चा गर्ने आधारहरू थुप्रै छन् । यी माथि उल्लेख गरिएका धारहरू मात्रै अहिलेका भारतीय रंगमन्चका विशेषता हुन् भन्ने मेरो तर्क होइन । मेरो विचारमा भारतीय रंगमन्चको बहुलतालाई नबुझिकन न त पारम्परिक न त आधुनिक भारतीय रंगमन्चको नै चर्चा गर्न सकिन्छ । फेरि अर्को कुरा, भारतीय रंगमन्च भनेको दक्षिण एशियाली रंगमन्च होइन । महत्त्वपूर्ण कुरा, वंगलादेश, श्रीलंका र नेपालमा भएका गतिविधिबाट हेर्दा के देखिन्छ भने दक्षिण एशियाली रंगमन्च वा रंगकर्मीबीचमा केही समान विचारहरू छन् । श्रीलंका, वंगलादेश र पाकिस्तानका रंगमन्चका यहाँ चर्चा गर्ने ठाउँ नभएकोले म अब बाँकि यहाँ वर्तमान नेपाली रंगमन्च वारे केही भन्न चाहन्छु ।

बर्तमान नेपाली रंगमन्च

मुख्यत: मेरो उद्देश्य तुलनात्मक अध्ययन गर्नु नभै सैद्धान्तिक पक्षको चर्चा गर्नु हो । वर्तमान नेपाली रंगकर्मीले लिएका चिन्ता र तिनका कामबाट हेर्दा नेपाली रंगमन्चले लिएको दिशा प्रस्ट देखिन्छ । अनि अर्को कुरा नेपाली रंगमन्चको इतिहासलाई नेपाली रंगमन्चको वर्तमान परिप्रेक्षभित्र रही हेर्ने दृष्टिकोणको विकास गर्नु आवश्यक छ । माथि उल्लेख गरिएका भारतीय समकालीन रंगमन्चका धारबाट हेर्दा अर्को कुरा के स्पष्ट हुन आउँछ भने हाम्रो रंगमन्चलाई अगाडि बढाउनु भनेको पुराना रंगमन्च पध्दतिको खोजी गर्नु साँस्कृतिक प्रदर्शनकलालाई उजागर गर्नु मात्र होइन, बरु यसको साथसाथै जीवनका जटिल पक्षहरूलाई समय र स्थान सापेक्ष सूक्ष्म ढंगबाट उजागर गर्ने खालका नाटक लेखिनु पनि हो । भारतरत्न भार्गविका शब्दमा समकालीन भारतीय रंगमन्चलाई शब्दको शक्तिबाट पनि बुझ्न सक्नु पर्दछ । विशेष रूपले मानिस जब आफ्नो सँस्कृति र सामाजिक वैभवताबाट एक्लिन्छ, उसलाई शब्दको संकट पर्न जान्छ । शब्दको महत्त्व अहिलेको रंगमन्चमा कि त हराउँदै गईरहेको छ कि त हामीले यसको माध्यमबाट हामीमा अन्तर्निहित निर्वचन

(obliqueness) लाई वाचाल गर्न सकिरहेका छैनौं । यस अवस्थामा, आज आएर हाम्रो रंगमन्च शब्दप्रति निकै चिन्तित छ । शब्दलाई अब नयाँ अर्थहरूलो हेर्न सक्नु दँछ ।[२५] यसबाट के बुभन सकिन्छ भने शब्दहरूको शक्ति पुरानो ढंगले अर्थ लगाएर मात्र हुँदैन । जीवन र जगतका लुकेका पाटाहरू खोतल्ने नयाँ दृष्टिकोणबाट यिनको प्रयोग हुनु पर्दछ ।

वर्तमान नेपाली रंगमन्चलाई हेर्ने धारहरू धेरै हुन सक्छन् । मुख्य कुरा वर्तमान नेपाली रंगमन्चलाई बुभ्न यसले लिएका चिन्ता र विषयबस्तुको व्याख्या गर्नुपर्छ । तर भारतीय रंगमन्चमा आएका विविध धारहरूबाट हेर्दा हाम्रो यस भेगका रंगमन्चले लिएको चिन्ता भन् प्रस्टरूपले देख्न सकिन्छ र वर्तमान नेपाली रंगमन्चको स्थिति भन् छर्लङ्ग पार्न सकिन्छ जस्तो मलाई लाग्छ । जसरी संस्कृत नाट्य र रंगमन्च यस भेगका विभिन्न क्षेत्रीय भाषाहरूमा रूपान्तरित हुँदा संगीत प्रधान क्षेत्रीय नाटक र रंगमन्च जस्तै *कुट्टियाटम* र *यक्षगाना*को विकास भएको थियो, त्यसरीनै मध्यकालीन नेपाल मण्डल वा काठमाडौं उपत्यकामा संस्कृत, मैथिली, नेवारी र बंगाली भाषाको सम्मिश्रण भएका नाट्यशास्त्रमा आधारित नाट्य परम्पराको विकास हुन गयो । चन्द्रेश्वर शाहका विचारमा मल्लकालमा लेखिएका नाटकहरूको पाण्डुलिपि हेर्दा के देखिन्छ भने ती सबै नाटकहरू गीत र संगीत प्रधान थिए । नन्दी गीत, प्रवेश गीत, निस्सार गीत, राजवर्णना, देशवर्णना, प्रशस्ति गान, आशिर्वचन एवं प्रसङ्ग गीत उल्लेख भएको देखिन्छ । सबै नाटकका प्रारम्भमा शिवको स्तुति र गीतको संख्या भएका कारणले गर्दा यी सबै संगीत प्रधान नाटक थिए ।[२४] यसवेला लेखिएका नाटकहरूमा आख्यान पनि कम छन् । कमल प्रकाश मल्लकाअनुसार *रत्नेश्वर प्रादुर्भाव* मा त संवाद पनि छैन । यस्मा एकपछि अर्को गरेर गीत राखिएका छन् जस्मा विभिन्न व्यक्तिहरू, मिथकीय र धार्मिक पात्रहरूको भूमिकामा गाउँछन् र नाच्छन् । भूपतीन्द्र मल्लको *विक्रमचरित्र*मा संवाद छ तर यस नाटकमा पात्र र कथारचनामा खासै कुनै शास्त्रीयपना वा महत्त्व दिइएको छैन । नाटक विवादात्मक रूप लिएर धनकी देवी र ज्ञानकी देवीमा कुन ठूली हुन् भन्ने विषयतिर जान्छ ।[२६]

हामीले आज आएर मध्यकालीन रंगमन्च पद्धति र नाटक शैलीलाई सम्भनु पर्ने कारणहरू छन् । त्यस्तैगरी पहिला लिच्छवीकाल र उक्त कालदेखि चलन चल्तिमा आएका विभिन्न देवी देवताका नाचहरूलाई पनि हामीले नयाँ दृष्टिकोणबाट हेर्न सक्नुपर्छ । हेर्दा नितान्त नेवारी लाग्ने यी नाचहरूमा नाट्यशास्त्रीय प्रभावहरू प्रशस्त मात्रामा छन् । हिन्दी, बंगाली र नेवारी भाषा र संस्कृतिका सम्बन्धले नयाँ शैलीको नाटकलाई जन्म दिएको र यही वेला विभिन्न देवीदेवताको नाममा ठाउँ ठाउँबाट नाचगान देखाउने प्रचलन चलेको र त्यसका लागि प्रशिक्षण पनि दिने काम राज्य पक्षबाट भएकोलाई अहिले हामीले अति महत्त्वका साथ हेर्न सक्नु पर्छ । मृगेन्द्रमान सिंह प्रधानकाअनुसार "मध्यकालमा मल्ल राजाहरूले लोकनृत्यमा मात्र नरुमल्लिएर विभिन्न धार्मिक चाडपर्वका अवसरमा अनेकौं धार्मिक नृत्यहरूको पनि सिर्जना गरे । जस्तै पाटनका राजा सिद्धिनरसिंहले नरसिंहको तथा राजा राय मल्लले नवदुर्गाको नाच चलाए । यी नृत्यहरू लोप नहोउन् भन्ने हेतुले प्रत्येक वर्ष र

चाडअनुसार ती नृत्यहरू दोहोऱ्याउन पनि थालियो । यस कार्यको सञ्चालनका लागि छुट्टै गुठीको पनि व्यवस्था गरियो । अनि नृत्यको तालीम दिने व्यवस्था पनि यसै गुठीबाट शुरु गरियो ।[२७]

मल्लकालीन रंगमन्च र प्रदर्शन कलाका थुप्रै महत्त्वपूर्ण पक्षहरू छन् । तीमध्ये राजा भूपतीन्द्र मल्लले रचना गरेको रंगमन्च पद्धतिको आविष्कारलाई नयाँ दृष्टिकोणबाट हेरिनु पर्दछ । उनले कल्पना गरेको र त्यही पद्धतिअनुसार मंचन गरिएको नाटक *विक्रम चरित्र*ले के देखाउँछ भने त्यस्ता रंगमन्चनलाई हामीले इतिहासमा भएको एउटा नवीन काम वा घटना मात्र नठानी आधुनिक समयमा पनि त्यसलाई सिर्जनशील ढंगले प्रयोगमा ल्याउन सक्नु पर्दछ । प्रचन्ड मल्लका अनुसार भूपतीन्द्र मल्लले प्रतिपादन गरेको उक्त रंगमन्च प्रस्तुतिमा:

> वाद्यवादकहरूका अगाडि उभिएका कलाकारहरू रंगमन्चीय चाल शुरु गर्दछन् र कलाकारहरू आफ्ने स्थानबाट त्रिकोणात्मक ढंगले दाहिनेतिर बढ्दै जाने चाललाई *लोम* भन्दछन् । त्यहाँबाट अभिनय गर्दै अर्को निश्चित स्थानमा पुग्दछन् । यस स्थानलाई *प्रकोण* भन्दछन् । यस स्थानबाट उभिई अभिनय गरिसकेपछि कलाकारहरू त्यहाँबाट सीधा अर्को वाटोतिर लाग्दछन् । यी कलाकारहरू फेरि एक निश्चित ठाउँमा पुगी उभिन्छन् र अभिनय गर्दछन् । यस स्थानलाई *द्वितीय* कोण भन्दछन् । प्रथम कोण र द्वितीय कोणका बीचको वाटोलाई "*मार्ग*" भन्दछन् । अनि यहाँबाट कलाकारहरू उभिएको ठाउँमा नै फर्कन्छन् । त्यस चाललाई "*विलोम*" भनिन्छ । यहाँ पुगेपछि डबली भित्रको रंगमन्चीय चालले पूरा त्रिकोण बनाउँछ ।[२८]

हामीले माथि उल्लेख गरेका छौं कि समकालीन भारतीय रंगमन्चका हस्तिहरू पनिक्कर, राघवन र स्वर्गीय शिवराम हेगडेले जसरी मध्यकालमा विकास भएका रंगमन्चका शैलीलाई आधुनिक रंगमन्चमा आधुनिक जीवन र जगतको ब्याख्या गर्नेगरी नाटकहरूमा प्रयोग गरेका छन् त्यसरी नै मध्यकालमा विकास वा प्रादुर्भाव भएका रंगमन्चका शैली र नाचलाई आधुनिक शैलीमा रूपान्तरण गरेर वर्तमान नेपाली रंगकर्मीले आफ्नो नितान्त रंगकर्मको बोध गर्ने वेला आएको छ । विगतमा भएका रंगमन्चका प्रयोगहरूलाई इतिहासमा भएको एउटा राम्रो कामको रूपमा मात्रै नलिई यसलाई वर्तमान समयमा पनि प्रयोगमा ल्याउन सक्नुपर्छ । त्यसो गर्दा हामीले अर्को एउटा कुरालाई ध्यान दिनु पर्नेहुन्छ । त्यो हो समकालीन पश्चिमी रंगमन्चमा देखिएका प्रवृत्तिहरू । अभि सुवेदीका विचारमा एशिया महादेशका रंगमन्चमा आएको पारम्परिक प्रदर्शन कलाको प्रयोग र पुनरूत्थानको लहर मुख्यतः पश्चिमी प्रयोगवादी रंगकर्मीहरूको प्रयोग र शैलीलाई अध्ययन नगरी बुभन सकिन्न । त्यसकारण यहाँको स्थानीय साँस्कृतिक प्रदर्शन कलाको आजको रंगमन्चमा व्याख्या गर्दा समकालीन पश्चिमी रंगमन्चमा आएका प्रयोगवादी शैलीको अध्ययन गर्नु पर्दछ ।[२९] यसले हामीलाई थप दिशा प्रदान गर्न सक्छ ।

नेपाली इतिहासमा आएको एकीकरण अभियानले नेपाली भाषालाई लोकप्रियता त दियो तर नेपाली भाषामा पनि रंगमन्चन कार्य गर्न सकिन्छ भन्ने बोध निकै पछि आएर मात्र भयो । त्यस अर्थमा हामीले नेपाली रंगमन्चलाई हेर्दा केही कुरा ध्यानमा राख्नै पर्ने हुन्छ । नेपाली भाषा र नेपाली रंगमन्च फरक फरक कुरा हुन् । नेपाली भाषामा रंगमन्चन शुरु हुनु भन्दा निकै पहिलादेखि नै हुँदै आएका रंगमन्चका शैलीहरू नेपाली भाषामा रंगमन्चन हुँदा प्रयोगमा नआउनुलाई हामीले एउटा गंभीर विषयको रूपमा लिनु पर्दछ । केशव प्रसाद उपाध्यायका अनुसार एकीकरण कालदेखि राणाकालको करीव मध्यसम्म पनि:

> ... *मुद्रा राक्षस* जस्तो विश्वकै उत्कृष्ट र श्रेष्ठ नाटकहरू मध्येको नाटकको समेत पूर्णतया नाट्यरूपमा भाषान्तर नहुनु आश्चर्यजनक छ । यसका अनेक कारण हुन सक्छन् । १. नेपाली भाषामा नाटक तयार पारेर मन्चित गर्ने चेतनाको अभाव २. *मुद्रा राक्षस* जस्तो राजनैतिक नाटक मन्चित गर्ने गराउने साहस वा त्यस खालको गंभीर नाटकप्रति जनरुचिको अभाव ३. नेपाली भाषामा नाटक खेलाउने नाट्यकर्मीको अभाव आदि । यो परम्परा स्थापित नभईसकेकाले नै होला सुरुचिपूर्ण, स्तरीय, उत्कृष्ट र मंचनयोग्य प्राचीन संस्कृत नाटकको अनुवाद गर्न सक्षम भवानी दत्त पाण्डे जस्ता विद्वान आफ्ना नजिक रहँदा रहँदै पनि भीमसेन थापाले उनीवाट नाटक तयार पार्न लगाउने वा उनले तयार पारेको नाटक मन्चित गराउने चाँजो पाँजो मिलाउनको सट्टा अंग्रेजसँग सुगौली सन्धि भएर शान्ति स्थापना भइसकेपछिको समयमा काठमाडौं स्थित 'आङ्ल रेजिडेन्सीका ब्रायन हज्सनलाइ' (sic) देखाउन मल्लकालीन नाटक (मिश्रित भाषा नाटक)*कंसवधक*को हिन्दी रूपान्तर तयार पार्न लगाई मन्चित गराउने थिएनन् ।[३०]

यसवाट के देखिन्छ भने नेपाली भाषामा रंगमन्चन गर्न सक्ने पूर्वाधारहरू पछि आएर मात्र बने । राष्ट्रीय एकीकरणको तीव्र अभियान र मुलुकलाई आधुनिक राज्य संरचनामा ढाल्ने प्रयाश शुरु भए । जुन दिन पृथ्वीनारायण शाहले काठमाण्डौ राज्यमा हमला गरे त्यो दिन इन्द्रजात्राको थियो । यसरी इन्द्रजात्राको दिन पारेर हमला गर्नु, जित्नु, अनि त्यस्ता जात्राहरू एवं रीतले चलिरहनुले पनि हाम्रो संस्कृति वारे केही कुरा प्रष्ट हुन्छ । अभि सुवेदीको विचारमा इन्द्रजात्राको त्यस भव्य तयारी र रथारोहण भईरहेको बेला पृथ्वी नारायण शाहको प्रवेश हुनुलाई एउटा पात्रको प्रवेशको रूपमा लिन सकिन्छ । इन्द्रजात्रा एउटा नाटक भयो । यसको हिँड्ने बाटो र यसको कलेवर रंगमन्च भयो र राजा जय प्रकाश मल्लको सट्टा पृथ्वीनारायण शाह रथमा चढ्नुले नेपाली राजनीतिमा परिवर्तन आएपनि रंगमन्च उही नै रह्यो ।[३१] नेपाली संस्कृति र प्रदर्शनकलाहरू यही संरचनामा अगाडि बढ्दै गए । नेवारी कला र संस्कृतिले ठूलो मञ्च पायो । यो नै राष्ट्रीय कला र संस्कृति बन्यो ।

अर्को महत्त्वपूर्ण कुरा नेवारी संस्कृति र कलाको सम्बन्ध राज्य एकीकरण र आधुनिकीकरणका क्रममा भएका महत्वपूर्ण घटनासँग हुनगयो । सत्यमोहन जोशीका अनुसार उन्नाईसौं शताब्दी लागेपछि नेपालको सांस्कृतिक फाँटमा दुई अलग धारहरू देखापरे । यसो गराउनेमा भीमसेन थापा पहिलो प्रमुख प्रशासकको रूपमा देखा परे । जोशीका शब्दमा भीमसेन थापाले:

> ... आफूलाई मुख्तियार पदको सट्टामा जनरल कमाण्डर इन् चिफ् र जनेल, कर्नेलका दर्जाहरू लागु गरे । स्वयम् आफू पनि पश्चिमी पहिरनमा फ्रेन्च शैलीका चुच्चे हेलमेट र जँगी पोशाकमा देखा परे । तर यिनको व्यक्तित्व भने पगडी र जामा लगाउने कालु पाँडेको व्यक्तित्व भैं उर्जिलन सकेन ... यसैताका स्वामी महाराजा रणबहादुर शाहको भारतमा काशी निवासको स्मृतिमा गङ्गाजीको किनारामा ललिताघाट र नेपाली मन्दिर नेपाली वास्तुकलाको शैलीमा बनाउन खातिर नेपालवाट ईंट, चुन, झिंगटी, काठ बोकाएर एक्सेण्ड कलाकमीहरू काशी पुगेर आफ्नो सांस्कृतिक सम्पदाको प्रदर्शनमा लागे ।[३२]

भीमसेन थापाले शुरुवात गरेको आधुनिकीकरणलाई जंगबहादुरको वेलायत यात्राले नयाँ मोड दियो । यसले वास्तुकला, चित्रकला र पछि गएर रंगमन्चमा ठूलो प्रभाव पार्‍यो । राणाशासन शुरु हुनु भन्दा अगाडिसम्म पनि श्री ५ रणबहादुर शाह र श्री ५ सुरेन्द्र विक्रम शाह जस्ता राजाले संगीत, नाटक र नृत्यमा राखेको चाखले नेपाली प्रदर्शनकारीकला र दरवारवीचको नजिकको सम्बन्ध कायम नै राख्यो । तर राणाकालमा आएर विस्तारै हिन्दी र उर्दू मिसिएको पारसी रंगमन्चले, अनि भारतीय मुलुकका चिनिएका रंगकर्मी वा कलाकारहरूले नेपालका राणा शासकहरू र तिनका भाइ भारदारका दरवार र महलमा राम्रो प्रवेश पाए । माथि चर्चा गरेनुसार पारसी रंगमन्चले कल्पनाशील संसारका पात्रहरूलाई त्यस्तै कलेवरमा समातेर उतार्ने रंगमन्चको शैलीको विकास गन्यो । दरवारभित्र हुने नाटकहरूका मंचनमा वैज्ञानिक प्राविधिको प्रयोग भयो भने वाहिर हुने पारसी रंगमन्चचाहिं नेवारी कलाकार र रंगमन्चको शक्तिवाट प्रभावित भयो जसले गर्दा रंगमन्च सम्बन्धी चेतना फराकिलो भयो ।

तर नेपाली नाटक भने अझैसम्म पनि मन्चन हुन सकेको थिएन । वि. स. १९५४मा माणिकमान तुलाधरले कलकत्तावाट रंगमन्च संवन्धी ज्ञान लिएर फर्के पछि *इन्द्र सभा*को सफल मंचन गरे । यसले दरवार र राणा शासकहरूको ध्यान खिच्यो । त्यही वेला *कसाई पल्टन* भन्ने नाट्य टोली र रंगमन्चीय प्रस्तुतिले पनि काठमाण्डौमा अपार सफलता पायो । *कसाई पल्टन*द्वारा प्रदर्शित नाचमा एउटा पर्दा नाच नसिद्धिएसम्म तन्काएर राखिइरन्थ्यो र त्यसमा उनीहरू आफै चित्र बनाउँथे जसले खासै अर्थ राख्दैनथे । तर त्यस्ता खाले प्रदर्शनले निकै लोकप्रियता पायो ।[३३] त्यस्तैगरी भारतमा लोकप्रियता हासिल गरेको पारसी थिएटर नेपालका विभिन्न ठाउँमा शुरु हुन थाल्यो । यस संगसंगै नौटंकी नामले चिनिने हिन्दी नाटकको प्रभाव

तराईतिर प्रशस्त मात्रामा रह्यो । खासगरी नाटक प्रदर्शनका लागि अस्थायी रंगमन्च तयार गरेर झलर, रेलिङ, पर्दा, सेट पिस र भडकदार भेषभुषाले काठमाडौ लगायत धरान, विरगन्जतिरका रंगमन्चमा समेत लोकप्रियता पाए, केशव प्रसाद उपाध्याय लेख्नुहुन्छ ।

यसरी पारसी रंगमन्चले एकातिर स्थानीय जनसमूहसँग स्थानीय शैलीमा नै नाटक मन्चन गर्ने परिपाटीलाई सहयोग गर्‍यो भने अर्कोतिर विस्तारै आधुनिक रंगमन्चको विकास जुन दरबारभित्र भईरहेको थियो, त्यसलाई पनि सहयोग गर्‍यो । यस अर्थमा हेर्ने हो भने नेपाली रंगमन्चको विकासमा पारसी रंगमन्चको योगदानलाई "अर्को" दृष्टिकोणबाट हेर्नु पर्दछ । नेपाली रंगकर्मी अथवा समालोचकहरूले यसलाई कम महत्त्व दिएको पाइएको छ । पारसी रंगमन्चले नेपाली रंगमन्चका विकासमा ठूलो योगदान दियो । यसले तयार पारेको पार्गम्भ्यतिमा नै बालकृष्ण समले नाटक लेखेर नेपाली रंगमन्चलाई नयाँ गति दिन सक्का हुन । नेपाली रंगमन्चको विकासलाई पारसी रंगमन्चसँग गरेको प्रतिस्पर्धाको रूपमा नालिङकन वरु यसलाई अन्तर-सम्वन्धको रूपमा लिनुपर्दछ । व्यातखेर काठमाण्डोमा निस्केका प्याख र अरु थिण्टर मंडलीले पाएका सफलताले के देखाउछ भने रंगमन्च भनेको शुद्ध भाषामा लेखेर साहित्य छर्दै हिड्ने कला होइन । अर्को महत्वपूर्ण कुरा माथि उल्लेख गरेअनुसार पारसी रंगमन्चले कल्पनाशील वा स्वप्नील जगतलाई त्यस्तै विम्बहरू र लक्षणावाट हेर्न सिकायो । बालकृष्ण समले लेखेका ऐतिहासिक र मिथकमा आधारित नाटकलाई पनि पारसी रंगमन्चले बसालेको र वनाएको संरचनासंग जोड्न सकिन्छ । विजय मल्लले समका नाटकको वारेमा लेखेको कुराले पनि यो प्रस्ट्याउन सकिन्छ । मल्लको विचारमा समका नाटक "यथार्थवादको प्रतिमानले हेर्दा विश्वासप्रद हुँदैनन् । यसको सट्टा वरु, उहाँका पौराणिक उपाख्यानका पात्रापात्राहरू विश्वसनीय हुन्छन्, किनभने ती पात्रहरूले कुनै आदर्श र विचारधाराको प्रतिनिधित्व गर्ने हुनाले एक टाईप, एक प्रतीकको रूपमा खडा हुन थाल्दछन्, यथार्थको प्रत्याशा र आग्रह पनि त्यसंग कसैले गरेका हुँदैनन्" ।[२४]

नेपाली रंगमन्च अहिले गाउँघरसम्म पुग्न नसकेको वेला र नाटकको नाममा समस्या र विपतका कथामात्रै वोल्ने परिपाटी बसेको वेला नाटकलाई एउटा मनोरन्जन र जनभावनासम्म पुर्‍याउन हामीले पारसी रंगमन्च र यसले गर्दा जन्मेका अरु नाट्य शैलीको पुनर्मूल्याङन गरेर रंगमन्चको शक्ति बुझ्ने काम गर्नु पर्दछ । राणा शासकले गाईजात्रा पर्व लगायत अन्य खालका नाट्य प्रस्तुति जस्तै प्याख, क्साई पल्टन र अरु थिएटर कम्पनीका प्रदर्शनमार्फि कडा निगरानी राखेर आफ्नो दरवारमा चाहिं पारसी र नौटंकी शैलीमा नाटक मन्चन गराएर आनन्द लिए । यो प्रवृत्ति शासकहरूको थियो । शासकहरूले लिएका गलत साँस्कृतिक नीति यसबाट स्पष्ट हुन्छ । तर पारसी रंगमन्चले नेपाली प्रदर्शन कलाक्षेत्रमा नयाँ सृजनाका अवसर दियो ।

यसै बेलादेखि संस्कृत नाटकलाई नेपालीमा अनुवाद गर्ने कामहरू हुन थाल्ने साथै यिनको मंचन पनि हुनथाल्यो । मोतीराम भट्टले जुनेवेला कालिदासको *शकुन्तला*

नेपालीमा अनुवाद गरेर दरवारमा मंचन गराए त्यही समयमा भानुभक्तको *रामायणले* नेपाली भाषाको रंगमन्चलाई फराकिलो पार्ने काम गरी रहेको थियो । यो एउटा महत्त्वपूर्ण घटना थियो नेपाली कला र साहित्यमा । मोतीरामले सृजना गर्न खोजेको नेपाली रंगमन्च र भानुभक्तको *रामायणले* नेपाली भाषा र कलालाई संस्कृत भाषा र शास्त्रसंग जोड्ने महत्त्वपूर्ण काम गरे । यसले गर्दा नेपाली भाषा र साहित्यले शास्त्रीय सम्वन्धन पायो । संस्कृत परम्परामा लेखिएका नाटक र ग्रन्थका अनुवादवाट नयाँ सृजनाका लहर यसरी आइरहेको बेला पश्चिमी शैलीका नाटकहरूको प्रभावमा पहलमानसिंह स्वाँरले लेखेको नेपाली नाटक *अटल वहादुरको* दार्जीलिङमा मंचन भयो । नेपाली रंगमन्च शुरुका दिनदेखिनै शास्त्रीय सम्वन्धन र पश्चिमी रंगमन्चको प्रभावको वीचवाट अगाडि बढ्दैआयो । त्यसवेला नेपाललगायत दार्जीलिङमा प्रस्तुत गरिएका नाट्य प्रस्तुतिका शैली र सिद्धान्तलाई नेपाली रंगमन्चले शुरुका दिनमा गरेका प्रयोग र खोजको रूपमा लिनुपर्दछ । नेपाली रंगमन्चको विकास अनुवाद, अनुकरण, प्रभाव, पारसी र अन्य लोकप्रिय खालका नाट्य–शैलीका वातावरणमा भयो । नेपाली रंगमन्च अव आएर मोतीरामदेखि मात्र आरम्भ भएको नभै प्राचीन कालदेखि नै यस देशमा भएका सम्पूर्ण नाट्य, नाटक–शैली र अरु प्रदर्शनीय कलालाई दिईने एउटा संज्ञा पनि भयो । यो काम पृथ्वीनारायण शाहको पालादेखिनै भएको थियो । तर राणाकालसम्म आइपुग्दा नेपाली रंगमन्चले अर्को मोड लिइसकेको थियो । आज आएर हेर्दा हामीले नेपाली रंगमन्चले वनाएको गोरेटोलाई हेर्नसक्नु पर्दछ । यसवाट लिनसक्ने कुराहरू धेरै छन् ।

आधुनिक नेपाली रंगमन्चको प्रारम्भ समको *मुकुन्द इन्दिराबाट* भयो । यो सर्वसाधारणले पैसा तिरेर हेरेको पहिलो नाटक थियो ।[३४] यो नाटकको प्रस्तुतिलाई रंगसजावटदेखि पात्र, परिधान र सम्वाद आदि सम्पूर्ण कुरामा नेपाली रंगमन्चको महत्वपूर्ण घटनाको रूपमा लिनसक्छौ ।[३५] तर अर्को दृष्टिकोणबाट हेर्दा के देखिन्छ भने नेपाली रंगमन्चले स्थानीय अथवा साँस्कृतिक प्रदर्शन कलाका वीच केही दुरी वढाएको पनि यही वेलादेखि हो । हुन त *मुकुन्द इन्दिरामा* एउटा नेवारी साँस्कृतिक नाचको प्रयोग भएको छ तर पनि नाटक मूलत: आधुनिक नाट्य–शैलीमा अगाडि बढ्छ । समको प्रयोगलाई आधुनिक नेपाली रंगमन्च र अरु प्रदर्शन कलाहरूले लिएको एउटा महत्वपूर्ण मोडको रूपमा लिन सकिन्छ ।

अर्को कुरा समपछि गोपालप्रसाद रिमाल, गोबिन्द गोठाले, विजय मल्ल र अरु नाटककार र निर्देशकहरूवाट नेपाली रंगमन्चले लिएको मोडलाई यहाँ भएका प्रदर्शन कलामा भएका विकाससंग पनि हेर्न सक्नु पर्दछ । नाटककार वा निर्देशककेन्द्रित समालोचनाको विनिर्माण गरेर साँस्कृतिक र अरू प्रदर्शन कलासँगको नेपाली आधुनिक रंगमन्चको सम्वन्धबाट पनि हामीले आधुनिक नेपाली रंगमन्चलाई हेर्न सक्नुपर्दछ । सन् १८५० देखि यता नेपाली प्रदर्शन कलामा आएका नयाँ मोडहरू हेर्दा के देखिन्छ भने राणा शासकहरूलाई आफ्ना तस्विर र पोट्रेट् वनाउँन लगाउने ठूलो चाख थियो । अधिकांश राणा शासकहरूले आफ्ना शालिग वनाउन लगाए । यिनलाई आफ्नो जीवन झल्काउने कथा र नाटक लेख्न वा लेखाउनचाहिं मनमा नआउनु

पछाडि के ले काम गरेको थियो त्यो एउटा खोजिको विषय हुन सक्दछ । अभि
सुवेदीका अनुसार:

नेपालमा व्यक्तिका तेलचित्र बनाउन लगाउने जंग बहादुरले भाजुमानलाई
सन् १८५० मा आफूसँगै वेलायत लगेका थिए । भाजुमानले पहिलोपटक
नेपाली मानिसका अनुहार चित्रमा उतारे । तिनले जंगको परिवारका
मानिसका साधारण अनुहारमा इतिहास बनाउनेका शक्तिको मिथक
भर्रिदिए ।... पाखापर्वतका परिवेशले रचित आफ्ना अनुहार चित्रमा उतार्न
लगाएर त्यसमा आफ्नै अनुहारको नाटक हेर्न चाहने राणाहरूलाई ती
मुहारचित्र शक्ति प्रदर्शन थिए ।[३७]

राणाहरूका यस्ता शौख र मिथक, ऐतिहासिक र रोमान्टिक कथा वा विषयवस्तुलाई
त्यही कलेवरमा सार्वभौमिक ढंगले राखेर प्रदर्शन गर्ने पारसी रंगमन्चको शैलीवीच
केही समानता थियो । पारसी रंगमन्चका विषयवस्तु राणा स्वयम् भएनन् । ती दर्शक
मात्र भएर रहे । मूख्य कुरा चित्रमा उतार्नका लागि तिनीहरूको कुनै इतिहास थिएन ।
तिनीहरूको वर्तमान थियो र ती आफ्ना भविष्य पनि सुनिश्चित राख्न चाहन्थे । तर
राणाहरूको शौख र उक्त शौखवाट निस्केका कलाले विक्रम सम्वत् १९९० को
दशकतिर आएर नयाँ मोड लियो । जब नेपाली साहित्यकार र बुद्धिजीवीहरूले शब्द,
रंग र विचारका सहारले सम्पूर्ण राष्ट्र र जीवनका चित्र हेर्ने र कोर्न सक्ने सपना
साकार पार्ने अठोट लिए । कलामा नयाँ शैलीहरूको विकास भयो । समका नाटकले
उतार्न खोजेका तस्वीर र अरु साहित्यकारहरूले उतारका शव्दचित्र त्यसै बेलाको
आव्हान थिए । मैले यहाँ भन्न खोजेको कुरा के हो भने हाल रंगमन्चमा आएका
गतिविधिलाई हामीले अरु प्रदर्शन कला र साहित्यमा आएका चिन्ता र नयाँ
प्रयोगवाट पनि हेर्न सक्नुपर्दछ । समका नाटकलाई उनले बनाएका पोर्ट्रेट, त्यस्तैगरी
भाजुमान, चन्द्रमान मास्के, अमर चित्रकार र त्यसपछिका आधुनिक चित्रकार,
संगीतकार र मूर्तिकारले अपनाएका शैलीबाट पनि हाम्रा आधुनिक नाटक र
रंगमन्चमा आएका विभिन्न सोचको व्याख्या गर्न सकिन्छ । हामीले वर्तमान
रंगमन्चलाई हाम्रो समयका कला वा अरु विधामा आएका नयाँ प्रयोगवाट हेर्ने नयाँ
तरिकाको विकास गर्नु पर्दछ । नेपाली रंगमन्चको इतिहासलाई पनि त्यसरीनै बुभ्न
र यसको अध्ययनको तरिका वा प्रणालीको विकास गर्नु पर्दछ । सम, रिमाल, तिवारी,
मल्ल दाजुभाइ हुदै आएको आधुनिक नेपाली रंगमन्चलाई अरु प्रदर्शन विधावाट
नअलग्याई अध्ययन गर्नु पर्दछ ।

हाम्रो रंगमन्चमा विभिन्न वाद वा धारहरू छुट्याउने रेखा तानिएका छन् । तर
हामीले कतिपय सवालमा प्रयोगवादी, यथार्थवादी र अयथार्थवादी भनिदै आएका
नाटकहरूले समातेका हाम्रा समयका कथा यथार्थवादी खालका छन् । यो कुरा
गोविन्द राज भट्टराईको शव्दमा यसरी व्यक्त गर्न सकिन्छ:

आदर्शवादी नाटकवाट अलग्गिनेहरूले यथार्थवादीको वाटो गेजे ।
पाश्चात्य साहित्यमा यथार्थभन्दा पर पुगेर अयथार्थिक नाटक साहित्यको

रचना गरिरहेका छन् । अयथार्थवादीहरू जीवनलाई यसको आकृति भन्दा
ठूलो वा सानो रूपमा, आकृतिलाई विकृतिको रूपमा, स्वीकारलाई शून्यको
रूपमा र मूल्यलाई अस्तित्वको प्रश्नको रूपमा पेश गर्दछन् । ... हाम्रा
प्रयोगधर्मी नाटककारहरू (मोराश, अशेष मल्ल, सरुभक्त, शिव अधिकारी,
अविनाश श्रेष्ठ)मध्ये कोही पनि अयथार्थिक तहमा ओर्लेका छैनन् ।
उनीहरू सवै नाटकको माध्यमले समाजलाई वा व्यक्तिलाई उसका विचार
वा विकृत परम्परालाई ठोकठाक गरी टुङ्गोमा ल्याउने प्रयत्नमा छन् ।
जस्तै गोपाल पराजुलीको समयसीमामा धनी गरीबवीचको खाडल र
वेथितिको जगजगी मास्न युद्ध छेड्ने युगौंको प्रतिज्ञा छ ।[३८]

यसरी यथार्थवादी, अयथार्थवादी, प्रयोगवादी र अरु नाट्य शैलीहरूकावीचमा सीमा
रेखाहरू तान्ने हाम्रो समालोचना पद्धतिलाई पनि हाम्रो समयमा आएर
पुनर्मूल्याइकन गर्नुपर्ने देखिन्छ । पाश्चात्य शैलीबाट हाम्रो सामाजिक परिवेशका
नाटकहरू मन्चन गर्दा देखिने समस्या र चुनौतीलाई वर्तमान रंगमन्च समीक्षकले
समाधान गर्नु पर्छ । यसै सन्दर्भमा भारतीय नाटककार गिरीश कर्नाडको भनाई यहाँ
राख्न चाहन्छु । पश्चिमेली यथार्थवादी नाटकहरू वैठक कोठाबाट शुरु हुन्छन् र त्यहीँ
अन्त्य हुन्छन् । व्यक्तिगत, पारिवारिक अन्तरसम्बन्ध त्यहीँ बन्छन् र त्यहीँ
भत्किन्छन् । तर भारतीय घरहरूमा त्यस्ता समस्या वैठक कोठामा न त जन्मिन्छन्
न त समाप्त नै हुन्छन् (१०)।[३९]

यसरी हाम्रा नाटक र रंगमन्च प्रस्तुतिलाई हाम्रै यताका संस्कृति, चलन र दैनिक
जीवनसँग जोडेर हेर्नु पर्दछ । यस भेकका अरवौं मानिसहरू कसरी जीवन यापन
गर्छन्, यिनका संस्कार र संस्कृति केकस्ता छन् तिनबाट मात्रै यिनका जीवन बारे
नाटक बन्न सक्दछन् । यस भेकका मानिसले कलालाई कसरी लिन्छन्, उनीहरू र
कलावीच हुने सम्बन्धलाई पनि हामीले वुभ्न सक्नु पर्दछ । यस उपत्यकाको हाम्रो
कला, संस्कृतिको सम्बन्धलाई अभि सुवेदीका शब्दमा यसरी व्यक्त गर्न सकिन्छ ।
अहिले पनि हामीमध्ये कोही जात्रा वा उत्सवमा नाच्न सक्छौं, कोही आधा मानव र
आधा गरुडको चाँगुनारायणमा अवस्थित मिथकीय मूर्ति तल एउटा अदृश्य शक्तिको
वोध गर्न सक्छौं । बज्रयोगिनी मन्दिरको टुँडालमा बाँदरले देवताका लिंग समातेर
हल्लाई राखेको कुँदिएको चित्र देख्दा कसैलाई मरीमरी हाँसो उठ्न सक्छ । हामीमध्ये
कोही स्वयम्भूको पाउमा बसेर नजिकैको चैत्यमा ध्यान गर्न सक्छौं । कोही कलात्मक
वुट्टाले सिंगारेको ढोकाबाट भित्र छिरेर एउटा पुरानो मन्दिरको परिसरमा जिउँदो देवी
कुमारीको दर्शन गर्न सक्छौं । हामीमध्ये कोही भगवानलाई खर्पन र कापेंशमा राखेर
शहर परिक्रमा गर्ने नाच र जात्रामा भाग लिन सक्छौं र भगवानको एक घरदेखि
अर्को घरसम्मको यात्राको अनुभव गर्न सक्छौं । कोही हाम्रा घरको धुरीभन्दा पनि
अग्ला गजुर भएका रथ तान्दै एउटा भव्य जात्रामा आफूलाई सामेल गर्न सक्छौं ।[४०]
यसरी दर्शक भएर हेर्ने र भित्री र वाहिरी दुवै खालका यात्रामा सामेल हुने वा
गराउने कला र संस्कृति व्याप्त भएको ठाउँमा न्हर आधुनिक प्रदर्शन कला प्रस्तुत

गर्दा हामीले सम्बोधन गर्नु पर्ने सैद्धान्तिक आधार ("प्रब्लमाटिक्स") लाई बुझ्न सक्नुपर्दछ ।

त्यस्तैगरी पन्चायती व्यवस्थाले देखेको नेपाली राष्ट्रियता र यस देशका नागरिकका चित्र एउटा एकदलीय संरचनामा आधारित थिए । यस संरचनामा तानिएका चित्रसँग नमिल्ने अरु चित्रमा अराष्ट्रिय तत्त्व भन्ने रंग हुन्छ भन्ने राज्यको दर्शनले काम गरेको थियो । यस देशका नागरिक चित्र पन्चायती व्यवस्थाको लागि दुई प्रकारका मात्र थिए । एउटा पन्चायती संरचनामा राख्दा देखिने र अर्कोचाहिँ यससँग नमिल्ने सबै खाले चित्र । यसरी पन्चायती व्यवस्थाले आफ्नो दर्शन अनुसारको नागरिक चित्रको संरचना पनि लिएर आयो । रंगमन्चमा यसको प्रभाव अनुसारको नागरिक चित्रको संरचना पनि लिएर आयो । रंगमन्चमा यसको प्रभाव देखियो । रंगमन्चलाई पन्चायत शैलीमा वा संरचनाभित्र राख्न केही महत्त्वपूर्ण काम भए । सम्वत् २०१८ देखि २०३१ सम्ममा विभिन्न ठाऊँमा नगरपंचायत र श्री ५ को सरकारको मातहतमा संचालन हुनेगरी बन्द रंगमन्चहरूको निर्माण भयो । यस सरकारको मातहतमा संचारका माध्यममा राज्यपक्षबाट भएको नियन्त्रणको हिसाबले कुरालाई त्यस वेला संचारका माध्यममा राज्यपक्षबाट भएको नियन्त्रणको हिसाबले पनि बुझ्न सकिन्छ । प्रत्युष वन्तका विचारमा जब राजा महेन्द्रले सन् १९६१ (२०१७) सालमा सम्पूर्ण शक्ति आफ्नो हातमा लिए तब राज्यले आफूसँग रहेका सम्पूर्ण संचारका साधनहरूमाथि नियन्त्रण लियो र राजाका विचारसँग असहमति राख्ने विपक्षी विचारमाथि सेन्सर भयो । साथै सरकारी नियन्त्रणमा रहेका संचारका साधनलाई भने राज्यले बलियो बनाउने कोशीस गर्यो । सन् १९६२ मा दुईवटा स्वतन्त्र न्यूज् एजेन्सीहरू राष्ट्रियकरण गरिए (२२) ।²⁹ यसबाट राज्यले कला वा रंगमन्चप्रति लिएको दृष्टिको पनि अनुमान गर्न सकिन्छ । तर जबसम्म स्वतन्त्र रंगमन्चप्रति लिएको दृष्टिको पनि अनुमान गर्न सकिन्छ । तर जबसम्म स्वतन्त्र सामाजिक वा नागरिक सभ्यता वा संस्कृतिको परिपाटी बस्दैन तबसम्म कुनै पनि कलाका माध्यममा राज्यतर्फबाट भएको एकलवादी नियन्त्रणले उक्त क्षेत्रमा खासै नौलो सृजना वा विकास हुनसक्दैन । रंगमन्चलाई माध्यमको रूपमा मात्र लिनु हुँदैन । मुख्य कुरा त रंगमन्च सृजना हुने परिवेशको समाज र नागरिक चेतना हुँदैन । मुख्य कुरा त रंगमन्च सृजना हुने परिवेशको समाज र नागरिक चेतना बनाउनु हो । पंचायत व्यवस्था यस पक्षमा चुपचाप थियो । सम्वत् २०१८ देखि २०३१ सम्ममा भएका रंगमन्च गृहहरूको निर्माणले नेपाली रंगमन्चमा खासै नयाँ परिवर्तन ल्याउन सकेन । तीसको दशकमा जब नयाँ रंगमन्चन गर्ने अनुहारहरू आए ती पन्चायती शैली र दर्शनले प्रेरित वा सरकारद्वारा संचालन गरिएका कलाको माध्यमभन्दा अघि बढे । केहीले चाहिँ यसैमा रहेर पनि नयाँ काम गरे । ध्रुवचन्द्र गौतम जसलाई केशव प्रसाद उपाध्याय प्रथम प्रयोगवादी नेपाली नाटककार मान्नुहुन्छ, अशेष मल्ल जसले सडक नाटकको सूत्रपात गरे र मोहनराज शर्मा इत्यादिले पंचायती व्यवस्थाले मानेको र स्वीकृति दिएको चित्रभन्दा भिन्न अनुहारको चित्र रचना गर्ने शैलीको विकास गरे । यिनका नाटकले नेपाली रंगमन्चलाई फरक धार दियो । विजय मल्लले लेखेका नाटक र उनले अपनाएका शैलीहरूलाई हामीले नेपाली रंगमन्चले लिएको मोडको रूपमा लिन सक्छौं । रंग सज्जा, पात्र, पात्र परिधानले गर्दा रंगकार्य आर्थिक रूपले महंगो हुँदै थियो । मल्लले एकांकी लेखेर नेपाली रंगमन्चलाई नयाँ गति दिए ।

यद्यपि यस उपत्यकामा सडकमा गरिने प्रदर्शन परम्परा र संस्कृति पुरानो हो तर अशेष मल्लको नाट्य समूहले यथार्थवादी ढंगको नाटक जसमा राजनीतिक समस्यालाई सम्बोधन गरिएको हुन्थ्यो र हुन्छ, त्यसलाई पहिलोपल्ट सडकमा प्रयोग गरे । नेपालको सडक नाटक यथार्थवादी नाटक वा रंगमन्चको धारबाट अलग्गिएको एक धार भयो । यसलाई हाम्रो सांस्कृतिक र पारम्परिक नाच, गान र रंगमन्चको शैलीसंग अध्ययन गर्दा उपयुक्त हुन्छ । सडक स्थानले हाम्रो संस्कृतिमा ठूलो महत्त्व राख्दछ । हाम्रो राजनीतिमा सडक एउटा महत्त्वपूर्ण तत्त्व भए भैं हाम्रो सांस्कृतिक रंगमन्च सडक भएर नै चल्छ । यसबाट हामीले सिक्नुपर्ने धेरै कुराहरू छन् । अधिकांश स्थान जस्तै नदी, मठ, मन्दिर, पहाड र अन्य स्थानमा व्यक्ति-व्यक्ति बीचका नाटक भन्दा पनि व्यक्ति र स्थान बीचका नाटक हुन्छन् ।⁴³ हालका दिनमा आएर *कचहरी* भनिने एक प्रकारको नेपाली सडक रंगमन्च अन्तर्राष्ट्रिय रंगमन्चमा आएका नयाँ शैलीसंग परिचित रहेको छ भन्ने देखाउँछ । यस धारले अगस्तो बोलको फोरयुम् रंगमन्चबाट शैली र वैचारिक शैली वरण गरेको देखिन्छ । यस्ता नाटकले सामाजिक समस्यामा आधारित नाटक मंचन गरेर दर्शकलाईनै नाटकको प्रस्तुतिमा सामेल गराउँछन् । यसबाट सडक नाटकले भन्न खोजेको कुरा झन प्रष्ट हुन्छ । यसलाई नेपाली सडक नाटकले लिएको एउटा मोडको रूपमा लिन सकिन्छ ।

अर्कोतिर, प्रहसन कलाले पंचायती संरचनामा राखिएका माध्यमबाटै पंचायती व्यवस्थाकै विसंगतिका कथाहरू अत्यन्तै हास्य रसमा मन्चन गर्यो । गीति नाटकहरूले नारी सम्वेदना र सामाजिक अन्यायको अति करुणामय रसमा रंगमन्चीय प्रस्तुति गरे । यस्ता नाटकहरूले पंचायती संरचनामा राखिएका व्यक्तिचित्र भत्काएनन् । *अनि देउराली रुन्छ, के सक्कली के नक्कली* जस्ता नाटकहरूले पंचायती राष्ट्रियता र दर्शनसँग नबाँझीकन नेपाली जनता र जगतको कारुणिक चित्र प्रस्तुत गरे । वर्तमान रंगमन्चमा हामीले तीसको दशकबाट सिक्नु पर्ने कुरा के हो भने रंगमन्चलाई राज्यले आफ्नो राज्य संरचनामा राखेर नियन्त्रण गर्नुहुँदैन । वरु यस्ले नाट्यकर्मीलाई आफ्नो खोज, अनुसन्धान अनुसारको रंगमन्च आविष्कार गर्ने अवसर दिनुपर्दछ । आज आएर राज्य, कलाकार र व्यक्तिवीचको सम्बन्ध सरल र लचिलो हुनु पर्दछ भन्ने देखिएकोछ । राज्यले निर्धारण गरेको दर्शन र नियन्त्रणमा राखेको माध्यमबाट मात्रै सृजनाका लहर चल्न सक्दैनन् । बन्द रंगमन्च भएका प्रेक्षालयहरू सरकारी स्वामित्वमा हुन् र नेपाली समकालीन रंगकर्मीहरूले भोग्नु परेका कठिनाईले के देखाउँछन् भने राज्यले कलाका माध्यमलाई नियन्त्रणमा लिनुभन्दा पनि कलाकार वर्गलाई आफ्नो सोचअनुसारको रंगमन्च सृजना गर्न वातावरण बनाईदिनु आवश्यक हुन्छ । आरोहण समूहको गुरुकुलप्रति नेपाली रंगकर्मी र समालोचकहरूले लिएको दृष्टिकोणबाट पनि यो कुरा बुझ्न सकिन्छ । जबसम्म रंगमन्च रंगकर्मीकै हातमा आउँदैन तबसम्म नयाँ सृजनाहरू गर्न सकिन्न ।

अर्को कुरा, हालको समयमा आएका राजनीतिक र सामाजिक चेतनासँग नेपाली रंगमन्च पनि उत्तिकै परिचित हुनु पर्दछ । आजको नेपाली समाजमा रहेका सामाजिक समस्या र चुनौतीलाई हामीले सवल र उचित ढंगले व्याख्या गर्नु पर्ने

वेला आएको छ । यो कुरा कृष्णवहादुर भट्टचनका विचारबाट पनि प्रष्ट पार्न सकिन्छ । भट्टचन लेख्छन्:

यहाँ एक भाषा, एक धर्म, एक संस्कृति, एक क्षेत्र, एक लिंग र एक वर्गको स्वार्थ अनुरूप ज्ञान र शक्ति पुनर्उत्पादन गर्ने त्यही एक थरिकै स्वार्थलाई पक्षपोषण गर्न दुरूपयोग गर्ने गरेको पाईन्छ । सन् १९९० पछि विगतमा भएका प्राविधिक नियन्त्रणलाई वहसको स्तरमा एक कदम अगाडि बढाएको भने हो । तर यसैवीच कतिपय सवालमा वहसबाट मुक्ति बढ्नुको साटो प्राविधिक नियन्त्रणतिरै फर्केर गएका प्रशस्त उदाहरण छन् । तापनि, सामाजिक, साँस्कृतिक सवाल अझै वहसमै केन्द्रित छ । अझै पनि मुक्तिको आशा निश्चित रूपमा यो अवधिमा भाँगिदै आएको छ ।[४३]

सम्वत् २०४६पछिको नेपाली समाज प्रजातान्त्रिक हुने क्रममा छ । रंगमन्चले त्यसै अनुसारको चेतना विकास गरेन भने अगाडि बढ्न सक्दैन । रंगमन्च पनि एक वर्गको वा एक सोचको हुनुहुँदैन । रंगमन्च सबैथरीका सोच र वर्गका, रंगकर्मीहरूका पकडमा पुग्नुपर्छ । अर्को कुरा राज्यले सबैखाले ज्ञान र कलालाई मौलाउने वातावरण वनाईदिनु पर्छ । सरकारी नियन्त्रणमा रहेका कलाका माध्यमलाई प्रजातान्त्रिक शैलीमा प्रयोग गर्नु पर्दछ ।

चालीसको दशक यता आएर नेपाली रंगमन्चमा नाट्य संस्था वा नाट्य समूहहरूको विकास हुनु र यिनीहरूले गरेका कामलाई हेर्दा के देखिन्छ भने कुनै पनि समयमा नयाँ धार खोज्नु र त्यसका लागि लागीपर्नु एउटा कुरा हो तर समय सापेक्ष त्यसमा पनि रचनात्मक किसिमले अगाडि बढ्न सकिएन भने यसले पनि नयाँ समस्या अगाडि ल्याउन सक्दछ । वर्तमान नेपाली रंगमन्चमा नाट्य-संस्थाहरू चाहे ती दशकौं पुराना हुन् वा ती नयाँ हुन् तिनका समस्या समान छन् जस्को समाधान सामूहिक रूपमा मात्रै गर्नसकिन्छ । तर संस्था-संस्थावीचको दूरी वढेको छ । यो एउटा चुनौती हो वर्तमान नेपाली रंगमन्चलाई । वर्तमान नेपाली रंगमन्च यस विषयमा गंभीर हुनु पर्छ ।

मैथिली र नेवारी भाषामा रंगमन्चन र नाट्य लेखन मध्यकालीन नेपाली समाजमा एउटा गौरवको कुरा थियो । यस्ता नेपालमा क्षेत्रीय भाषा वा संस्कृतिको रंगमन्चलाई हामीले अहिले नयाँ दिशा दिनु परेको छ । महेन्द्र मलंगियाले मैथिली रंगमन्चमा गर्नुभएको कामलाई समकालीन नेपाली रंगकर्मी र समीक्षकहरूले ठूलो महत्व दिएर हेरेका छन् । मैथिली रंगमन्चले अहिले पौराणिक र ऐतिहासिक विषयवस्तु भन्दा सामाजिक समस्यालाई आफ्नो प्रमुख विषयवस्तु बनाएको छ । यसको श्रेय मलंगियालाई जान्छ । रामदयाल राकेशको विचारमाः

समसामयिक युग संवेदनालाई आफ्नो रचनाको सेरोफेरोमा अभिव्यक्ति दिनु महेन्द्र मलंगियाको मुख्य अभिप्रेत रहेको छ । उहाँले पारम्परिक, अन्धविश्वास, सामाजिक वन्धन र युगीन समस्या तथा समसामयिक

युगवोधको सम्यक अभिव्यक्तिमा अग्रसरता देखाउनुभएको छ । यस्तै यस्तै कथावस्तुको वरिपरि नाटककार मलंगियाको नाटक लेखन आफ्नो सार्थकताको खोज गर्दछ र काव्यात्मक भाषाको प्रयोग गर्दछ ।[४४]

चालीसको दशकतिर खुलेका नाट्य समूहहरूवाट नेपाली रंगमन्चले नयाँ दिशा लिनुलाई यस देशको राजनीतिसंग पनि जोड्न सकिन्छ । सम्वत् २०४६ सालको प्रजातन्त्र प्राप्तिपछि यी संस्थाहरूलाई नयाँ विम्व र संरचनाको खोजी गर्नुपर्ने चुनौती आए । वहुदलीय व्यवस्थामा दलहरू फुक्का भएझैं यिनीहरूमा नयाँ जोश र अलग धारहरू निस्के । सर्वनामले सडक नाटकलाई कायम राख्यो । आरोहणले अनुदित नाटकहरू मन्चन ग¥यो । पोखराको प्रतिविम्ब र जनकपुरको मिनापाले नयाँ नाटकहरूपनि मंचन गरे । रमेश के. सी.ले लेखेको विसंगतवादी नाटकले नेपाली रंगमन्चमा नयाँ सम्वाद खोल्यो । यसै समयमा देशका विभिन्न ठाउँमा नाट्य-संस्था खुले तर यिनीहरूका कार्य योजनाहरू रंगमन्च सृजना गर्ने माध्यम र साधनहरू जुटाउनमै वढी सीमित रहे । राज्यले रंगमन्चको माध्यमलाई नियन्त्रित गर्ने कार्य त गरेन तर रंगकर्मीहरूलाई त्यस्तो कुनै सहयोग पनि गर्न सकेन । नाट्य-संस्था र राज्यवीचको सम्वन्धलाई लिएर नयाँ सम्वादहरू भए । सत्य मोहन जोशीका विचारमा देशले संस्कृत सम्वन्धी नीति बनाउदा यस्ता संस्थाहरूलाई पनि ध्यानमा राख्नु पर्छ । "संस्कृति नीतिमा राज्य पक्षकोमात्र प्रमुख भूमिका हुने होइन । यसका लागि देशमा भएका तथा छरिएका सांस्कृतिक गतिर्विधमा लागेका साना ठूला संघ, संस्था, क्लव, प्रांतष्ठान आदि गैरसरकारी पक्षहरूको पनि जनसहभागिता हुनु पर्दछ । अन्यथा सरकारी पक्षको सांस्कृतिक नीति एकोतिर र जनताले चाहेको सांस्कृतिक नीति अर्कोतिर भइरहने सम्भावना हुन्छ" ।[४५]

समकालीन धार

नेपाली रंगमन्चको इतिहास वारे यस छोटो विवेचनार्पाछि म वार्किे लेखमा समकालीन नेपाली रंगमन्चको वर्तमान अवस्था वारे केही चर्चा गर्न चाहन्छु । समकालीन भारतीय रंगमन्चमा आएका धारहरू, जसवारे माथि नै व्याख्या भइसकेका छन्, तिनवाट पनि वर्तमान नेपाली रंगमन्चलाई केलाउन सकिन्छ । तर सबैभन्दा प्रमुख कुरा वर्तमान नेपाली कला वा रंगमन्चलाई यस क्षेत्रमा भइराखेका गतिर्विधिवाट नै हेर्नुपर्दछ । समकालीन दक्षिण एशियाली रंगमन्चमा हुने गतिर्विधिमा नेपाली रंगकर्मीहरूको सहभागिता र हाम्रो यहाँ हुने यस्ता गतिर्विधिमा उनीहरूको सहभागितालाई हालका दिनमा नेपाली रंगमन्चमा भएको महत्वपूर्ण घटनाको रूपमा लिन सकिन्छ ।

२१ मार्च २००४ देखि ६ अप्रिलसम्म दिल्लीमा आयोजना भएको छैठौं *भारत रंग महोत्सव*मा नेपाली नाटक र त्यसलाई प्रस्तुत गर्ने समूहलाई गरिएको निमन्त्रण र त्यहाँका रंगकर्मी र समीक्षकहरूले हाम्रो प्रस्तुतिमाथि गरेका र लेखका विचारले दक्षिण एशियाली रंगमन्चमा हाम्रो स्थान केही रूपमा प्रष्ट पा¥यो । अप्रिल १२,

२००४ मा प्रकाशित *इन्डिया टुडे* भन्ने भारतको साप्ताहिक पत्रिकाले *अग्निको कथा*लाई उक्त महोत्सवमा प्रदर्शित ७५ नाटकहरूमध्ये दश उत्कृष्ट नाटकको सूचीमा राख्यो । अभि सुबेदीद्वारा लेखिएको, सुनील पोखरेलको निर्देशन र निशा शर्मा, अनुप वराललगायत अन्य कलाकारहरूका सफल अभिनयले उक्त नाटकमा भएको ध्वनि र दृश्यबीचको संयोजनलाई त्यहाँका रंगकर्मी र समीक्षकहरूले निकै मन पराए । त्यस लेखकलाई कलाकारका रूपमा उक्त नाटक र महोत्सवमा भाग लिई भारतीय रंगमन्च समीक्षक र रंगकर्मीहरूसँग छलफल र भेटघाटमा सामेल हुने अवसर प्राप्त भयो । कपिला वात्स्यायनले *अग्निको कथा* हेरेर यसलाई एक उच्चकोटीको नाटक भन्नुभयो । यसरी छलफलका क्रममा समकालीन दक्षिण एशियाली रंगमन्चको धारबारे केही कुरा प्रष्ट भए । नाट्य संस्थाहरूले यस भेकमा गर्नु परेका संघर्ष र तिनका सामुन्ने रहेका चुनौती एकै खालका छन् भन्ने कुरा उक्त महोत्सवले देखायो । त्यस्तैगरी अनुप वरालले तीनवटा कथालाई *कथादेश*को शीर्षक दिएर प्रस्तुत गरेको प्रस्तुतिले वर्तमान नेपाली रंगमन्चमा नयाँ शैलीको सूत्रपात गर्‍यो । देवेन्द्रराज अंकुरका विद्यार्थी अनुप वरालले राखेका चिन्ता "उतावाट शुरुभएको यथार्थवादले हाम्रा साहित्य र कलालाई छोप्दै लगेको छ" र "कथालाई कथाकै रूपमा राख्ने" प्रयत्नलाई हामी समकालीन भारतीय रंगकर्मीहरूले राखेको चिन्तासंग पनि जोड्न सक्छौँ । यसबाट दक्षिण एशियाली रंगमन्चको साभा चिन्ता अभिव्यक्त हुन्छ । यथार्थवादी रंगमन्चको शैलीबाटभन्दा पनि आफ्नो सांस्कृतिक कला र नाचका कलेवरवाट हाम्रो समय र जीवन नाप्न सकिन्छ भन्ने धारणा आजको दक्षिण एशियाली रंगमन्चमा व्याप्त देखिन्छ ।

त्यस्तैगरी हालका दिनमा आएर नेपाली नाटकहरू दक्षिण एशियाका अन्य देश, यूरोप र जापानमा मंचित हुनुलाई वर्तमान नेपाली रंगमन्चले लिएको नयाँ गतिको रूपमा लिन सकिन्छ । *आरुका फूलका सपना, अग्निको कथा, आमामाया* र *पुतलीको घर*ले राष्ट्रिय र अन्तर्राष्ट्रिय क्षेत्रमा पाएको चर्चालाई नेपाली वर्तमान रंगमन्चले लिएको अग्रगतिको रूपमा लिन सकिन्छ । गएका चार पाँच वर्षदेखि यता आएर *नेपाल सेन्टर अफ आई. टि. आई.* ले गरेको गतिविधिलाई वर्तमान नेपाली रंगमन्चसंग जोडेर हेर्नुपर्ने हुन्छ । दक्षिण एशियाली रंगमन्चलगायत विश्वका अन्य देशहरूमा रंगमन्चसम्बन्धी भएका सेमिनार, सभा र गोष्ठीमा नेपाली प्रतिनिधिको सहभागिता र यिनले राखेका विचारवाट पनि हाम्रो रंगमन्चको परिचय विश्वसाम प्रस्तुत भएको छ । विभिन्न राष्ट्रिय, अन्तर्राष्ट्रिय जर्नल, किताव र थिएटर बुलेटिनहरूमा नेपाली रंगमन्च सम्बन्धमा र नेपाली रंगकर्मीहरूले विश्व रंगमन्च सम्बन्धमा राखेका विचार र लेखहरू छापिएका छन् । यसले वर्तमान नेपाली रंगमन्चले अन्तर्राष्ट्रिय रंगमन्चसँग गरेको सम्वाद देखाउँछ । समकालीन नाटक निर्देशक सुनील पोखरेलका विचारमा वर्तमान समयमा हामीले सबै प्रकारका नाटकहरू मंचन गर्नुपर्छ । हामीले चलनचल्तीका, पूर्वीय र पश्चिमी शैलीका सवैखाले नाटक मंचन गर्नुपर्छ । हामीले लोक र सांस्कृतिक प्रदर्शन कलाको पनि उत्तिकै महत्वकासाथ मंचन गर्नुपर्छ । हामी अहिले नयाँ जोश र सोचका साथ काम

गर्दैछौ । त्यसकारण हामीले विभिन्न शैलीका रंगमन्च र नाटकको प्रस्तुति गर्नुपर्दछ । मुख्य कुरा खोजी हो । जुनसुकै नाटक वा रंगमन्च यदि त्यो नेपाली भाषा वा अरु क्षेत्रीय भाषामा गरिएको छ भने त्यसले हाम्रा कलाकारको नाट्यकलामा परिवर्तन ल्याउँछ र आधुनिक प्रदर्शनीय कलाको क्षेत्रमा नयाँ सोचहरू ल्याउँन सक्छ (९) ।[४७]

यसै क्रममा हाले स्थापित *गुरुकुल* र *समनाटकघर*ले देखाएको अर्को कुरा के हो भने रंगमन्चलाई चाहिने भौतिक सुविधादेखि अध्ययन अध्यापन कार्यसमेत रंगमन्चकेन्द्रित हुनुपर्दछ । भारतको राष्ट्रिय नाट्य विद्यालयबाट अध्ययन गरी फर्केका सुनील पोखरेल, अनुप वराल र अनुराधा वरालले यहाँका रंगकर्मी र नाटककारहरूसँग मिलेर गरेको कामले नेपाली रंगमन्चलाई संस्थागत संरचना दिने काम गरिरहेको छ । यिनीमध्ये *गुरुकुल* स्थापना गरी वर्तमान नेपाली रंगकर्मीहरूको रंगमन्च सम्बन्धी चेतना उजागर गरी पठनपाठन गराउँने सुनील पोखरेलको योगदान अत्यन्तै महत्त्वपूर्ण छ ।

भारत, बंगलादेश र श्रीलंकाका नाट्य-संस्थाहरूले रंगमन्चमा नयाँ क्रान्तिहरू ल्याएको कुरा हाम्रा अगाडि प्रस्ट छन् । केहीको नाम लिनु पर्दा भारतको राष्ट्रिय नाट्य विद्यालय, निनासाम थिएटर इन्स्टिच्यूट, सोपनाम इन्स्टिच्यूट अफ पर्फमिङ आर्ट्स, नाटक कर्नाटक् रंगयाना र दर्पण एकाडेमी अफ पर्फमेन्स् आर्ट्सलाई लिन सकिन्छ । कला र संस्कृति हेर्ने भारतका केन्द्रिय र राज्य सरकारअन्तर्गत रहेका अन्य संस्था र प्रतिष्ठानहरूको कामलाई विश्व रंगकर्मीहरूले महत्वका साथ हेर्छन् । यी संस्थाहरूले भारतीय रंगमन्चमा नयाँ क्रान्तिका वा सृजनाका लहरहरू ल्याइदिएका छन् । हामीले वर्तमान भारतीय रंगमन्चबाट सिक्नुपर्ने धेरै कुराहरू छन् । नेपाली प्रदर्शन कला वा रंगमन्च हेर्ने वर्तमान सरकारी र गैरसरकारी संस्थाहरूबीच अन्तर-सम्वन्ध हुनु पर्दछ र यसलाई सक्रय बनाउनका लागि भारतीय नाट्य संस्थाहरूसँगको सम्बन्ध रचनात्मक रूपमा अगाडि वढाउनु पर्दछ । त्यस्तैगरी बंगलादेशका बंगलादेश सेन्टर अफ आई. टि. आई. र सेन्टर फर एशियन थिएटरले गरेका कामले पनि हाम्रो वर्तमान नेपाली रंगमन्चले सिक्न सक्ने कुरा धेरै छन् । हाल यी संस्थाहरूसंग हाम्रा सम्बन्ध एकदमै नजिकको छ ।

कुनै पनि देशको रंगमन्चको भविष्य यससम्बन्धी संस्था र व्यक्तिले गरेका अनुसन्धान र राखेका विचारले निर्धारित गर्दछन् । यो कुरा सर्वनाम नाट्य समूहले नेपाली सडक नाटकलाई दिएको गरिमा र यसले निरन्तर गरेको कार्य र विश्वका अन्य नाट्य संस्थासँग राखेको सम्बन्ध र क्रियाकलापले पुष्टि गर्दछन् । विगतका दिनहरूमा कलकत्ताका रंगसर्जक प्रोविर गुहालगायत रु अन्य अलगधारका भारतीय रंगकर्मीहरूसँग सर्वनामको सम्पर्क हुनु र हालका वर्षमा आई आरोहण नाट्य समूह, नेपाल सेन्टर अफ आई. टी. आई र अन्य नाट्यकर्मीको सम्पर्क बढ्नुले यस अन्तर्सम्बन्धका अनेकौं आयामहरूलाई देखाउँछ । यसबाट के देखिन्छ भने वर्तमान नेपाली रंगमन्च बहुलधारालाई स्विकार्छ । मुख्य कुरा मूलधार र अलगधारको शैलीलाई पक्ष र विपक्षको रूपमा नलिई यसलाई बहुलधारको रूपमा लिइनुपर्दछ । यसबाट

रंगमन्चमा देखिएका शैलीलाई प्रजातान्त्रिक संस्कारवाट हेर्न सकिन्छ, जसवाट नयाँ सोचको सृजना हुन सक्दछ ।

वर्तमान नेपाली रंगमन्च क्षेत्रमा भएका गतिविधिहरूलाई हेर्दा नेपालमा नारी रंगकर्मीहरूको उपस्थिति न्यून देखिन्छ । भारत, श्रीलंका र पाकिस्तानका नारी निर्देशक र नाटककारहरूले उठाएका नारीसम्वन्धी मुद्दालाई हेर्दा वर्तमान नेपाली रंगमन्चले दक्षिण एशियाली रंगमन्चवाट सिक्नुपर्ने अरु कुरा पनि छन् जस्तो देखिन्छ । यसै सिलसिलामा नारीवादी रंगमन्च समीक्षक र लेखिका सांगता रायमाझीले आफ्नो खोज वा अनुसन्धानको क्रममा व्यक्त गर्नुभएको विचार यहाँ राख्न चाहन्छु । आधुनिक प्रदर्शन कला, संस्कृतिमा भन्दा प्राचीन र मध्यकालीन नेपालमा भएका वा चलेका प्रदर्शन कलाहरूमा नारी सम्वेदना र तिनका प्रस्तुति कलात्मक र वलिया छन् । उहाँ लेख्नुहुन्छ, नेपाली सांस्कृतिक प्रदर्शन कला चाहे त्यो लोकगीत वा कथा होस् वा प्रस्तर कला नै होस्, धार्मिक होस् वा सार्वभौमिक, त्यसवाट नारीशक्ति एकदमै वलियो रूपमा प्रस्फुटित हुन्छ । वास्तवमा भन्नु हो भने नेपाली संस्कृतिको वैभवतालाई नारीप्रधान संस्कृतिको रूपमा हेर्नसकिन्छ । तर आधुनिक कालमा आएर नारी सम्वन्धी हाम्रा प्रस्तुतिलाई हेर्ने हो भने हामीले प्राचीनकालदेखि चल्दै आएको नेपाली संस्कृतिवाट केही सिक्नु पर्ने हुन्छ (१३-१४) ।[ ]

वर्तमान समयमा लेखिएका नाटकहरूले नेपाली रंगमन्चमा नयाँ भाषा शैलीको विकाश गरेको देखिन्छ । भारतीय रंगमन्चको सन्दर्भमा भार्गवले उठाएको शब्दको महत्वलाई हाम्रो रंगमन्चको सन्दर्भमा पनि हेर्न सकिन्छ । वर्तमान नेपाली रंगमन्चमा नेपाली सांस्कृतिक कलेवर भएका नाटक लेखन थालेकाछन् र नाटक निर्देशकहरूले पनि त्यसलाई प्रयोगमा ल्याउन थालेकाछन् । यसवाट सांस्कृतिक प्रदर्शन कलावाट उर्जा लिने काम भएकोदेखिन्छ । त्यस्तैगरी चर्या नृत्य र अन्य नेवारी नृत्यहरू पनि आधुनिक रंगमन्चमा प्रस्तुत भइरहेकाछन् । तर यी प्रदर्शन कलाको प्रयोग उर्जामात्र लिन नभई यिनको संरचना र यिनले समातेका नाटकीय तत्वलाई मुख्य आधार वनाएर रंगमन्चको नयाँ शैली खोज्नका निम्ति प्रयोग हुनभने अझै वाँकि नै देखिन्छ । भारतीय रंगमन्चमा कुट्टियाट्टम, यक्षगाना र अरु क्षेत्रीय प्रदर्शन कलाहरू मंचित हुन्छन् । त्यसै रंगमन्चअनुसारका नाटक पनि लेखिदै छन् । तर नेपाली प्रदर्शन कला र रंगमन्चबीच रहेको सम्वन्ध स्पष्ट भईसकेको छैन । नेपालमा हाल आएर प्रज्ञाप्रतिष्ठानले वर्तमान रंगमन्चमा प्रभाव पार्न नसकेको चिन्ता छ । तर नेपाल सांस्कृतिक संस्थानले एक वरिष्ठ नाट्यकलाकार हरिहर शर्माको संलग्नता र आयोजनामा फेर्न लागेको भौतिक संरचनाले रंगमंचका नयाँ संभावनाहरूलाई पनि जन्म दिएकोछ । तर समग्रमा नेपाली नाट्य-समूहहरूले सामना गर्नुपरेका चुनौतीलाई हेर्दा के देखिन्छ भने यी संस्थाहरूवीचको सामन्जस्य एकदमै न्यून छ र यिनले भारतीय वा अन्य दक्षिण एशियाली मुलुकका रंगमन्च संस्थाहरूसंग सम्वन्ध वढाएर रचनात्मक कामका लागि सिक्नुपर्ने वा अनुभव साटासाट गर्नुपर्ने वेला भएको छ । मेरो विचारमा यस्ता सम्वादले वर्तमान नेपाली रंगमन्चलाई वढी पेशागत वा "प्रोफेशनल" वनाउन मद्दत गर्न सक्नेछन् । यसको साथै हामीले अध्ययन र

अनुसन्धानका लागि चाहिने एउटा वातावरणको सिर्जना गर्नु पनि आवश्यक छ । जवसम्म नाट्यकर्मीहरू शिक्षित र पेशागत रूपले सवल हुदैनन् तवसम्म नेपाली रंगमन्चले महत्वपूर्ण उपलब्धि हासील गर्न सक्नेछैन । तर आजसम्मका गतिविधि हेर्दा र यस लामो छलफलपछिको निचोडमा भन्नुपर्दा, नेपाली रंगमन्चले समयअनुसारका गति लिई जतिसक्दो मात्रामा भएपनि अघि वढिरहेको देखिएको छ । तर चुनौतीहरू घेरै छन् । परम्परागत सोच र सांघुरा दृष्टिकोणहरूलाई मात्र आधार राखी आजको रंगमन्चको समयसापेक्ष विकास हुदैन भन्नेकुरा हामीले विर्सनु हुदैन ।

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२३.गिरीश कर्नाड, *की नोट स्पिच, स्वर्ण रंग महोत्सव २००३,* साभार अभि सुवेदीको डायरीबाट ।

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२८. प्रचण्ड मल्ल, *नेपाली रंगमन्च,* काठमाडौ: नेपाल राजकीय प्रज्ञा प्रतिष्ठान २०३६, १६ ।

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BOOK REVIEW

Joshi, Jibgar. 2006. *Regional Strategies for Sustainable Development in Nepal.* Kathmandu: Lajmina Joshi. 156 pages with 38 Tables and 8 Figures, Price NRs. 400.

Unlike many Nepali bureaucrats, Dr. Jibgar Joshi has already published three books and several articles on regional and urban developments in Nepal. The present book is the latest volume making a new contribution to that goal. Regional planning begun in Nepal since the Fourth Five Year Plan (1970-75). Regional planning as a model of development failed in terms of reducing poverty, regional disparity and equity among people. The author, however, reiterates that it could be used as an effective tool for sustainable development in Nepal. The central issue in regional planning in Nepal, according to him, is 'how to improve our sectoral plans through regional and sustainable development?' (p. iv). To improve sectoral plans, the basic questions raised by the author are: a) allocation of regional resources across the country; b) nature of investments in different regions; c) strategic activities in different regions, d) social transformations in the society; and d) building institutions for decentralization. This review concerns itself with how these questions are answered by this publication.

The present book consists of nine chapters. Chapter I briefly highlights the basic concepts such as regional planning, sustainable development, environmental sustainability, poverty and empowerment, coordination, decentralization and resource region. The last part of this chapter offers a "country profile" which includes the location, physical divisions, climate and rainfall, demography, economy and administrative divisions. The author notes that sustainable development has three parts: economic growth, social equity and environment, which must be linked together to make development an integrated whole (p. 6). Chapter II deals with regional disparity in terms of the development index, agriculture, road transportation, electricity, communication, drinking water, education and health. It also provides an interesting table on relative per capita GDP and HDI based on 15 regions of Nepal. This follows reviews of regional development policy in Nepal and their gaps. The author argues that the following policies should be adopted to make regional planning more effective: investment strategy, national urban system and resource development strategy, institutional development and regional research (pp. 40-44). Chapter III describes migration and urbanization in Nepal, considering demographic changes and the trend in urbanization over the years. The author links urbanization with development and the ways and means of ensuring spatial integration for better planning.

Sustainable development depends on the effective government action at the regional level. He believes that more urban growth leads to more economic growth and the reduction of poverty. Chapter IV outlines national goals and regional strategies to be adopted for development planning and conditions necessary for sustainable development. He argues that poverty alleviation strategies will need a spatial vision (p. 70).

Chapter V is an attempt to develop a spatial framework for development based on growth poles and growth centres in Nepal. He develops a "spatial framework of development" showing interrelationships between growth centres of different ranks. Thus, growth centres in the context of regional planning are beautifully drawn in maps (pp. 104-108). Chapter VI shows investment plans, policies and strategies in different ecological regions: Mountain, Hills and Tarai. Chapter VII shows the need for good governance at different levels with adequate decentralization planning. He argues that the spatial aspect should be embodied in the national urban system and growth centre strategy (p. 122). Chapter VIII provides strategies for capacity building and technology transfer. He believes that social transformation in Nepali society is possible only through economic principles (p. 129). According to him, rural areas should be transformed into urban areas, incorporating technology and resources (p. 131). The last chapter summarizes the major contents of the book.

No doubt, the author identifies many of the shortcomings and contradictions in regional planning in Nepal. The volume's strength is found in the author's articulation of regional planning and its ethos and pathos in the context of Nepal. The major strength of the book is that there are many useful tables for students, teachers and planners including the well a documented description of development processes in Nepal. At the same time, the book is rich in ideas, concepts and questions, particularly his approach of "spatial" and "sustainable development" could be a model for development in the context of regional planning in Nepal in the future. No doubt, the volume is successful in answering many of the questions that it raises.

Studies on regional development and planning in Nepal tend to focus on macro-level structures while ignoring local-level processes and concerns. The present volume also follows this general trend and thus falls short while dealing with the many issues that concern regional strategies for development in Nepal.

The author suggests that development is primarily an economic concept and that other aspects such as social and political ones are peripheral. It is common knowledge that without political stability, development cannot take place. For example, the 9th and the 10th Plans have been seriously affected meeting their targets by the peoples war, launched by the Communist Party (Maoist) in February 1996. This war has massively disrupted the social,

economic, political and cultural lives of people and affected a large number of development projects. There is virtually no analysis to show how local/regional development projects that have been initiated/activated were affected by the people war. The issue here is not only the proper allocation of resources to the concerned people and regions but also how the delivery of goods and services has been affected due to these unavoidable circumstances. In addition, delivery of goods and services is also linked to the governance system. A recent observation visit (October 2006) by a study team in the Karnali Region clearly noted that the "Food Delivery Programme" to the people in the concerned region by helicopter is completely misused by contractors as they carry other goods (such as beer bottles and liquors) instead of grains.

The fact is that Nepal's development efforts to date have not changed Nepal's status as one of the poorest countries in the world. The landholding size, which is a major source of livelihood and income for more than 80% of the population of the country, is shrinking every year. The level of human development, as measured by the human development index, is skewed every year. In terms of global ranking, Nepal's position was 138 among the 177 countries ranked (UNDP 2006). Among 100 ethnic/caste groups in Nepal, the level of poverty and the human development index differs by region and among various groups such as women, Adibasi/Janajati, and Dalits. The net effect of development planning is almost zero in terms of equity and social development of people. In brief, the state-led growth strategy and development models have not substantially benefited the poor and marginalized people of Nepal. It is clear that exogenous, top-down and blue-print development models are not working in Nepal. In brief, the issue here is how the author's proposed model of spatial and sustainable environment could be made to be more effective in the context of regional planning in Nepal. At the same time, the national space has no meaning without human survival or welfare.

The author relies too much on statistics instead of understanding the sociology of Nepali people, particularly the culture of Nepali administrators and planners. Though he acknowledges development planning is barely successful in Nepal, he hardly details why planning fails. The hurdles that exist in implementing various projects are nowhere mentioned. The whole issue of poor governance and decentralization in the history of Nepal is not addressed. Despite all the metaphoric slogans of decentralization since 1975, there has been little transfer of power from the centre to the local bodies (such as the DDCs, municipalities and VDCs) even today. But the bureaucracy is loaded with paperwork in the name of development (do this or do that) rather than delivering goods and services to the people. Though thousands of NGOs and hundreds of INGOs have been working for the empowerment of people in different regions of Nepal over the last 40 years, it

is not known how much people are empowered in social, economic and political terms. In other words, there is a need for an analysis of the success and failure of different projects in the context of regional planning in Nepal. How to create viable communities (p. 123) at the local level to deliver goods and services is yet another major issue, as the structure of traditional elites has not changed. In a country where there is corruption at every level of governance, and flattery plays a major role in bureaucracy, is it possible to change the existing practices of bad governance to good governance? Theoretically, everybody knows the functions of institutions at different levels (Table 7.1), but somehow these institutions do not provide services. In fact, so-called institutions in Nepal are hardly institutionalized, as power politics and *Afno Manche* (one's own people) dominate and run these institutions. So in reality there is little transformation in society in terms of institutions. Social, economic and political structure over the years. The major issue is to change the working pattern of institutions so that good governance and the decentralization process can work from the centre to the local level.

Again the author's ideas of 'growth centres' are based on population size. I feel that simply considering population size without noting down the available physical and human resources at the local level jeopardizes the very idea of growth and service centres. For example, wherever groups like the Newars, Thakalis, and Sherpas live, it should be remembered that some level of business activities will be there. Where are the plans and policies to raise the income of local people? In other words, is required a lot of field research for better design of regional planning in Nepal. The issue of urbanization vis-à-vis growth is raised. He argues that the future of small settlements is dark (p. 62). Simply integrating rural areas does not make an area urban. It is unrealistic to create new urban centres or towns to develop as growth poles without providing basic facilities required by the people. Even today, there is barely the provision of clean drinking water, and almost all of Kathmandu's streets have potholes. One can aptly describe Kathmandu as a cluster of unauthorized buildings, hazardous day-to-day pollution, and no green belt anywhere to make a good living. Is this the kind of an urban area we want in the future?

Finally, I feel that the author overemphasizes the importance of spatial factors in the context of regional planning. A more spatially-integrated society might produce greater equality and opportunity, but it is difficult to see how it would create a greater equality of results in the absence of a more redistributive social policy.

In brief, Nepali planning to date is skulduggery: there is little delivery of goods and services to the people. Nepali planning requires a tour-de-force, a completely new approach for the development of the Nepali people.

– Dilli Ram Dahal

Notes to Contributors

The hard copy as well as soft copy of manuscripts in Times New Roman font size of 12 should be submitted. The hard copy should be on A4 paper with a 4 cm margin on all four sides. The first page of the manuscript should have only, the title, authors' name, the authors' affiliation, and any necessary footnotes. Mailing and e-mail address should be included. The text should refer to notes numbered consecutively throughout the article, and bibliographical references should be cited in the text by the author's last name, date of publication and page number, e.g., (Tiwari 2001: 108) or if the author's name is mentioned in the text, by the date and page reference only, (1965:108). Entries in the references should be in alphabetical and chronological order of authors. They should include the details in the following order: Name of the author(s) – surname first, date, title, name of the periodical, volume number (Arabic numerals to be used throughout), pagination (for article in periodicals and books with several authors), place of publication (and name of the publisher for a book). Examples of reference format are as follows:

Tiwari, Sudarshan Raj. 2001. *The Ancient Settlements of the Kathmandu Valley*. Kathmandu: Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies. Tribhuvan University.

Maharjan, Pancha Narayan. 2000. "The Maoist Insurgency and Crisis of Governability in Nepal." In Dhruba Kumar (ed.), *Domestic Conflict and Crisis of Governability in Nepal*. Kathmandu: Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies, Tribhuvan University, pp. 163-196.

Khatri, Sridhar K. 2001. "Teaching of International Relations in Nepal." *Contributions to Nepalese Studies*, 28:2, pp 139-154.

Shrestha, Bal Gopal. 2002. "The Ritual Composition of Sankhu: The Socio-Religious Anthropology of a Newar Town in Nepal." Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis. Leiden University.

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