

# THE NEWARS: THE INDIGENOUS POPULATION OF THE KATHMANDU VALLEY IN THE MODERN STATE OF NEPAL

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## Introduction

The Newars are the 'traditional' inhabitants of the Kathmandu Valley, whose population comprises 1,041,090 i.e. 5.6 percent of the total population of Nepal, i.e. 18,491,092 in 1991.<sup>1</sup> Although the Newars are spread throughout the country and beyond its boundaries in different parts of India, the majority of them are still concentrated in the valley of Kathmandu, which is the capital of modern Nepal. Previously, only the valley of Kathmandu was known by the name 'Nepal', and for many people the word 'Nepal' still continues to mean it. The Newars speak Nepālbhāṣā, a Tibeto-Burman language with a rich ancient and modern literature going back to the fourteenth century. During the Malla reign, from the 13th century till its downfall in 1769, the Kings themselves did a great deal to promote literature in Nepālbhāṣā, as well as in other languages like Maithilī, Avadhī, Bhojpurī, and Bengālī. Sanskrit literary tradition was cultivated in the Kathmandu valley for fifteen centuries. The Malla courts supported all languages, classical and vernacular, without discrimination. The extent of the literary tradition in other languages indicates the cosmopolitan nature of the Malla courts (Malla 1982: 7). The bulk of the rich tradition of Newar art and architecture, ritual and culture, dates back to this period.

For some time this tradition continued after the Gorkha conquest of Nepal in 1769 A.D.. The treaty of 1775 between Tibet and Nepal during the reign of King Pratap Singh Shah was compiled in Nepālbhāṣā. The Shah Kings Ranabahadur (1777-1799) and Girvanyuddha (1799-1816) wrote many songs in Nepālbhāṣā.<sup>2</sup> King Rajendravikram (1816-1847) even wrote a play in Nepālbhāṣā.<sup>3</sup> In the later period of the Shah reign, however, the Nepālbhāṣā was replaced by the language of the rulers, the *Khasakurā* (The latter language is at present known as Nepālī, which is now the official language of Nepal). Fifty years from the end of Rajendravikram's reign until

the beginning of the renaissance period (1899-1940), Nepālbhāṣā literature was conspicuously absent, except for a few religious songs. The discontinuation of Nepālbhāṣā literature during that period still remains a mystery. With the rise of the Rana oligarchy (1847-1951)<sup>4</sup> the Shah Kings were almost imprisoned by their prime ministers. At the beginning of this century, in 1905 Rana prime minister Chandra Shamsheer (1900-1928) banned Nepālbhāṣā from the court of justice, the administration, land registration and so on.<sup>5</sup> His successors, such as Juddha Shamsheer (1932-1945), went even further in restricting the Nepālbhāṣā writings.<sup>6</sup> Many Nepālbhāṣā writers had to suffer jail sentences and many others were exiled during this period. From then onwards, Newar intellectuals started to establish literary organisations to promote their language. The language movement which did not have any feature of an ethnic inspiration at the beginning began to acquire an ethnic nature from the late 1970s. In September 1995 the National Forum of the Newars (*Nevāh De Dabū*) was founded, with the aim of seeking to assert the ethnic rights of the Newars.

### Historical Background of Newar Identity

**The Origin of the Newars:** The word 'Newar' is etymologically identical with the place name 'Nepāl'. According to the historian Baburam Acharya the words Nevār, Nevāl or Nevāh all have developed from the single word 'Nepāl'.<sup>7</sup> Malla confirms that an A.D. 512 inscription of Vasantadev of Tistung is the first evidence that the word Nepāl was used for the people of Nepal.<sup>8</sup> According to the oldest chronicle of Nepal the *Gopālarājavamśāvalī* the Kirātas ruled Nepal for 32 generations.<sup>9</sup> So far there is no recorded history of the Kirātas. Only their successors, the Lichhavis, who ruled Nepal from the fifth to the ninth century A.D. have left a corpus of inscriptions. Those inscriptions are all in pure Sanskrit language. By analysing the place and river names written in those inscriptions K.P. Malla concluded that, although the Lichhavi rulers were inclined to use Sanskrit, the language spoken by the people belonged to the Tibeto-Burman stock. He considers it likely that the nominal found in the inscriptions are an archaic form of Nepālbhāṣā.<sup>10</sup> According to Gellner (1995:5) 'The Nepālbhāṣā seems to have been spoken by the inhabitants of the Kathmandu Valley as far back as records go.' Another anthropologist Bista (1976: 16) writes, 'The Newar people had been settled in the Nepal Valley since prehistoric time'.

After the Lichhavis, Nepal was ruled by the Thakuris from the ninth to the twelfth centuries. But not much historical evidence has been found from this period. So far, the earliest evidence of the use of the Nepālbhāṣā is found on a palm leaf of Pātan Ukū Bāhāl dated A.D. 1114.<sup>11</sup> The earliest dated epigraph

on stone in the Nepālbhāṣā was found at Vajrayoginī Sankhu and dated A.D. 1172. Later, during the Malla period (1200-1768), the Nepālbhāṣā flourished, both in inscriptions and in manuscripts. Vast collections of classical Nepālbhāṣā literature are preserved in Nepal in the National Archives, the Keshar library and the Āsā Archives, whereas thousands of manuscripts from Nepal have been carried away by Western scholars and deposited in different libraries of the world.<sup>12</sup>

In the Malla period the name *Nepālbhāṣā* was the common name for Nepālbhāṣā. The first use of the word Newar was found in an inscription dated A.D. 1654 of King Pratap Malla at Hanumandhoka (Malla 1991: 32). The Newar people to this day call their language *Nepālbhāṣā*; in western philology it is now more commonly known by the name 'Nevāri' (Lienhard 1992: 3).<sup>13</sup> For centuries Nepal, the valley of Kathmandu, remained a melting pot for people of different races and different creeds:

The race of the Niwars is a mixed race, derived from Indian or Thibetan stocks, and their religion naturally presents a corresponding mixture of the Indian and Thibetan creeds. [Oldfield 1974(1880): 73]

From the religious point of view the majority of Newars follow Hinduism and Buddhism inseparably.<sup>14</sup> There are also Muslim and Christian Newars in Nepal. Muslim Newars have long been living in Kathmandu and speak the Nepālbhāṣā. The Christian Newars were forced in exile to India as soon as the Gorkha King Prithivinarayan Shah conquered Nepal in 1769.

Since the valley of Nepal was the centre of trade, culture and civilisation, the Gorkha conquerors had to accommodate the Newars in the modern state of Nepal. At the same time a section of Newar traders virtually welcomed the Gorkha conquest and extended help to strengthen their hands.<sup>15</sup> However, many Newar inhabitants who fought against the Gorkha invaders had to suffer a great deal: they either received capital punishment or were forced into exile, while the people belonging to areas like Kirtipur and Patan were severely tortured.<sup>16</sup>

To a certain extent the Gorkha rulers continued to support the culture and traditions of the Newars. By using the palace of the Malla Kings the Gorkha Kings also accepted Newar court culture and traditions. Many feasts and festivals of the Newars were given royal support as before. As traders the Newars received more opportunities to develop their profession under the Gorkha rule. They spread all over the Kingdom and opened shops wherever they went. Many new Newar settlements appeared outside the valley of Nepal.<sup>17</sup> The latest population census of Nepal reports that Newars are spread

in all the 75 districts of the country. However, in many districts their number is very low.<sup>18</sup>

Under the hands of the new rulers Newar language and culture had to suffer in a great deal. The composition of Newar society is highly complicated with divisions in castes and caste hierarchies. It is said that the division of castes was introduced among the Newars by the early Malla King Jayasthiti (A.D. 1382-1395), as the nineteenth century chronicles and oral traditions testify (Vaidya Shrestha 1995: 180-90). But the 'Newar' caste hierarchy began to acquire after 1769 conquest of the Gorkha a rigidity it had not had before as they were made subordinated to Parbatiyās' (Gellner 1995: 12).<sup>19</sup> Later, under the Gorkha rule, the first Rana prime minister Janga Bahadur introduced a legal code in 1854. In spite of their own caste system the Newars were collectively labelled one *jāt* (caste) in the 1854 legal code, and their castes were lumped together with other Parbate castes. The Parbates follow Hindu Varnaśram caste hierarchies, which divide their society into four distinct levels: Brahmin at the top and Gāine, Damai, Sarkī and Kāmī at the bottom. Other ethnic groups were also ranked under the same caste system.<sup>20</sup> The 1854 legal code gave the Newars their separate ethnic identity as a culturally and linguistically distinct group.

### **The Newars Under the Rana Rule (1846-1950)**

**The Suppression of Nepālbhāṣā :** During the early Rana period, Newars were able to get various administrative posts. Some were made tax collectors or acquired influential administrative posts. In 1861 one Newar called Siddhiman was offered the military title of colonel.<sup>21</sup> Yet the Newars were excluded from political or decision-making posts as well as from military service from the beginning of the Gorkha conquest in 1769. Before 1890 people in general had no opportunity to educate their children in Nepal. In the 1890s when the first school of Nepal, 'Durbar (Palace) School' was made accessible to the public, the Newars were among the first to make use of education (Malla 1992: 22). The Rana rulers were afraid of any kind of social awakening because their rule was not based on popular support. Their rule was in fact a minority rule. Even within the Rana families themselves sabotage, division and struggle for posts and power were obvious. The Valley of Kathmandu was closed for people from other parts of Nepal. So they realised that the real danger came from educated people in the valley itself who might turn against their family rule. They were especially afraid of those people who were exposed to India and inspired by the freedom fighters there. It was the time when Indian people were already widely active in the Indian National Congress (1885) against British colonialism.<sup>22</sup> Since the Ranas in Nepal were working closely with the British they were warned by

the British of possible revolts. So the Ranas saw the Newars as the inhabitants of the politically centralised state and as possible antagonists who might strangle them any time. Intellectuals, social reformers, political activists or religious reformers such as Theravāda Buddhists or Ārya Samāj supporters were all regarded as a threat to their autocratic rule.

The suppression of the Nepālbhāṣā and of Newar intellectuals intensified during the reign of Chandra Shamsheer (1901-1928). In 1905, he banned Newar Language from the court of justice and administration. The language of the Newars 'Nepālbhāṣā' began to be called 'Nevāri' while the name 'Nepālī' used to designate the 'Khasakurā' or Gorkhālī language.<sup>23</sup> In the later period of the Rana regime Newar intellectuals had to suffer heavily. The Rana regime was afraid of Newar Language and wanted to suppress it to stop any propaganda which might be communicated through that language against their minority rule. Interestingly, at the same time the Nepālbhāṣā literary renaissance age (1899-1940)<sup>24</sup> began, which became a milestone in the history of Newari literature. Pandit Nisthananda Vajracarya (1858-1935), Siddhidas Amatya (1867-1930), Jagat Sundar Malla (1882-1952), and Yogvir Singh Kansakar (1886-1941) are the four most eminent literary figures of the Nepālbhāṣā renaissance period.

In 1909, Nisthananda, the eldest among them was the first to publish a Nepālbhāṣā book, entitled *Ekaviṃśati Prajñāpāramitā*, a Buddhist text with Sanskrit ślokas. In 1914, he printed another book, *Lalitavistara*, which deals with Buddha's life, many other Buddhist religious stories, and the *Svayambhūpurāna*, a mythical story about the creation of the Nepal Valley. Though these works were based on religious stories, he lent his own originality to them. He brought printing equipment from Calcutta and carried out all the printing work himself, including the laborious job of letter composition. Later it became difficult for him to print his books because the government imposed censorship on all publications. Virtually all Nepālbhāṣā publications were banned. So Nisthananda had to print and distribute his books secretly.<sup>25</sup> His major contribution was to publish materials for the first time in the spoken language of Newar society, using the *Devanāgarī* script to do it. Newar scholars had used old scripts and old language in writing and copying thousands of manuscripts without taking changes in their spoken language into account. The tradition of copying manuscripts by hand in Nepal scripts (Bhujimol, Pracalit or Ranjanā scripts) continued until the beginning of this century.<sup>26</sup>

The most prolific writer of Nepālbhāṣā literature during the renaissance period was Siddhidas Amatya. He wrote nearly fifty books including a version of the epic *Rāmāyana*. His early writings deal mainly with religious and moral philosophy, and later he wrote many poems which reflect his ideas

on social reforms. He advocated equal rights for women including access to education. He wrote against caste discrimination which was then supported by law. These were in fact revolutionary writings for his time. He used to visit the gatherings of *Ārya Samāj*, whose members were active in social reform programmes.<sup>27</sup> There he encouraged young people to write in Nepālbhāṣā. An active young man of *Ārya Samāj*, Jyanbahadur Newa, writes that he would never have become a writer in Nepālbhāṣā if Siddhidas had not inspired him in those meetings (Newa 1967: 142-3). Many young students who were inspired by Siddhidas later became very famous writers of Nepal. One of the avowed adherents of the *Ārya Samāj* Sukraraj Shastri was hanged by the Rana government in 1941. He was the author of the first Nepālbhāṣā grammar, *Nepālbhāṣā Vyākaraṇa* (1928), and also wrote text books in Nepālbhāṣā for children *Nepālbhāṣā Varnamālā*, *Nepālbhāṣā Reader 1* and *2* (1933). Sukraraj was executed together with three other political activists: Gangalal Shrestha, Dharmabhakta Mathema and Dasharath Chand. They were all members of the People's Council (*Prajā Pariṣad*), which was an anti-Rana political organisation backed by King Tribhuvan. But Sukraraj himself had no political connection with the *Prajā Pariṣad* and was punished because of his association with the *Ārya Samāj* and his social reform activities (Rose and Joshi 1966: 55). These four martyrs except Dasharath Chand were Newars. However, it would be wrong to conclude that they were executed because they were Newar nationalists.

In 1912, Jagat Sundar Malla, who advocated education in the mother tongue, opened a school in Nepālbhāṣā in Bhaktapur. He wrote English-Nepālbhāṣā and Nepālbhāṣā-English dictionaries, as well as text books, both in Nepālbhāṣā and in Nepali. He was arrested and threatened with imprisonment if he did not stop his activities. He was the first to advocate education in the mother tongue. He had to pretend being mad to continue his work.<sup>28</sup>

In a similar manner Yogvir Singh, the youngest among the four literary figures suffered at the hands of the Ranas. He was arrested on several occasions, fined and tortured. His cloth shop became a gathering place for Nepālbhāṣā as well as Nepali writers of those days.<sup>29</sup> When it was found out by the government, their writings were seized, and they were severely warned not to hold such meetings. In 1924, when he published one of his religious poems he and his publisher were fined. In 1929, Yogvir and his friends sought permission to open a public library. All those who signed this petition were fined heavily.

The Rana regime was supported by the British colonial power. But, with increasing protests against their occupation of India, the British themselves were losing ground. So the fear of the Ranas was understandable. They were

terrified by the increasing nationalist movement in India, as it was encouraging the educated youngsters of Nepal. They wanted to stop such developments in Nepal at any cost. The suppression of the Nepālbhāṣā writers, the majority population in the centre of power, was one expression of this fear. Therefore, another Rana prime minister, Juddha Shamsheer, went further in the effort to suppress the Nepālbhāṣā. In 1933 he called a meeting of all known Newar writers and pressed them to stop writing. In January 1941, when he learned that with King Tribhuvan's support some young people were active in the *Prajā Pariṣad* (People's Council), he was infuriated. He arrested many other people together with members of the Council. They were social activists, teachers and writers. The four martyrs mentioned above were also connected with this incident. On this occasion many Nepālbhāṣā writers were also arrested and sent to jail for several years. This proved to be a gift to Nepālbhāṣā literature because some of the political prisoners turned into writers. Though they had to write secretly they wrote many books in prison, which made a significant contribution to Nepālbhāṣā literature (Malla 1978: 17-18).

**Literary publications and organisations:** The brave 'Bir' history of Nepālī literature began in India with the publication of the weekly *Gorkhālī* (1915-16) from Banaras by Suryabikram Gyawali and *Candrikā* from Kurseong by Parāsmānī Pradhān, which postulated the nationalistic image of modern Nepal.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, the Newar people living in India for study or business purposes were also active in the service of their mother tongue. They started establishing organisations and publications from India. In 1926, the first Nepālbhāṣā literary organisation *Nepālbhāṣā Sāhitya Maṇḍala* was founded in Calcutta by Dharmaditya Dharmācārya (1902-1963), who had earlier started publishing the first Nepālbhāṣā journal *Buddhadharma va Nepālbhāṣā* (1925-1928).<sup>31</sup> Those Buddhist monks who had been expelled from Nepal in 1944 for advocating *Theravāda* established *Dharmodaya Sabhā*, a Buddhist Religious Council in Sarnath and started publishing books in Nepālbhāṣā. Later this Sabhā started publishing a second Nepālbhāṣā journal *Dharmodaya* (1946) (Kasa 1988, Joshi 1974). *Cvasāpāsā*, another Nepālbhāṣā literary association was also established in Calcutta (May 1950). It came to Nepal after the political changes in February 1951.

In 1945, together with some political prisoners, Cittadhar Hridaya and other Nepālbhāṣā writers were released from prison by the Rana government. In the same year, Padma Samsheer, who was more liberal than his predecessors became prime minister. In 1946, he allowed those Buddhist monks, who had been expelled from Nepal, to return. He also lifted the ban on Nepālbhāṣā publications and opened a separate department of censorship

for publications in Nepālbhāṣā. Within three or four years 115 Nepālbhāṣā books were cleared by the censorship as recorded by the-then censor officer Khadgaman Malla of the Nepālbhāṣā department (Malla 1983: 58-81). But the liberalisation process of the Rana regime started too late. In 1947, when India achieved independence, anti-Rana movements gained greater momentum in Nepal, whereas Rana rule continued to slacken after the British retreat from India. In February 1951, the Nepali people overthrew the Rana autocracy and a multi-party democracy was introduced in Nepal.

### **The 1951 Change and Nepālbhāṣā Movement**

In spite of the political changes of 1951, the Nepālbhāṣā did not gain much in status. It did not achieve the right to be used in the court of justice or in the administration. In a way, Nepālbhāṣā lost more ground than before under the so-called democracy. Nepālbhāṣā was highly important as a language of the Valley. It was the language of the highly educated community of Nepal. As a language of the cultural centre and the centre of power, Nepālbhāṣā was the language of wider communication and also served as a lingua franca. It had to loose gradually under new system, because it did not receive any recognition from the government, while Nepali alone was made the medium language of government, administrations and schools.

In January 1951, just before the fall of the Ranas, 'Democracy Radio Nepal' (*Prajātantra Radio Nepal*) started an anti-Rana propaganda medium broadcasting news in Nepali, Nepālbhāṣā and Hindi languages. Shortly after the 1951 change, many public schools were opened to educate the common people. Unfortunately, in those schools Nepālbhāṣā was not recognised as a medium of instruction. It was only taught as an optional subject. The *Nepāl Rāṣṭriya Vithyāpitha*, a non-governmental organisation which took the initiative in the field of education in the public sector, recognised Nepālbhāṣā as an alternative medium in those schools and colleges which were run by them. This compelled Newar scholars to take responsibilities to produce educational materials in Nepālbhāṣā.

On March 3, 1951, the Council of Nepālbhāṣā Language (*Nepālbhāṣā Pariṣad*), was formed by Newar scholars, which began to publish educational materials and literary books. Simultaneously, other Nepālbhāṣā organisations also started work in similar fields. In this way they had more freedom than before to work for their mother tongue. During this period many new publications in Nepālbhāṣā appeared and new organisations were established. The first Nepālbhāṣā daily newspaper and literary magazines appeared during this same period.

However, in 1956, the interim government of K.I. Singh declared Nepali to be the only language of instruction in schools at the cost of all other



languages of Nepal. This decision inspired some protests in the Tarai (southern belt of Nepal) in favour of the Hindi language (Rose and Joshi 1966: 202) but no protest was made by the Nepālbhāṣā speakers. The 1959 constitution of Nepal declared Nepali to be the national language of Nepal. The ten years of democracy in Nepal produced a chaotic situation. Allegations among the political parties and counter-allegations, and sometimes even within one party, revealed dramatic divisions. Their aims were to hold on to power or to capture power. As a result, the people were getting fed up with politics. The first general elections took place in 1959, and gave the *Nepali Congress Party* a massive victory. But the clashes within the ruling party rapidly increased. The end came in 1961, with King Mahendra banning all political parties.

Propagating the disadvantages of the multi-party system he introduced the partyless *Panchayat System* in Nepal. Freedom of expression was limited under that system. To the detriment of all other languages, religions and ethnicity, he strongly imposed a "one nation, one language and one religion" policy in favour of the Nepali language, the Brahmins and Chhetri (Khas) community, and the Hindu religion. Therefore, together with all other non-Nepali languages of Nepal, Nepālbhāṣā again suffered a great setback under Khas chauvinism.<sup>32</sup> In 1965, Radio Nepal stopped broadcasting Nepālbhāṣā and Hindi news. It gave rise to protests from literary circles. Various Nepālbhāṣā literary and cultural organisations in the Valley organised protest literary meetings for one year. Many Nepālbhāṣā writers were arrested and tortured. But the protests were limited to the literary elites who were unable to gain support from the common people. It was because the common people did not realise the consequences of the repressive measure applied against their language by the government. Even within the literary circle the division was obvious. So the protest meetings had to stop without having achieved anything. However, a year long of literary protest meetings inspired a number of youths, most of whom remained devoted to the cause of language rights.

Publication became more difficult with the imposition of the censorship which intended to prevent any kind of publication against the *Panchayat System*. For many years no new Nepālbhāṣā journals or newspapers received permission to be published. In 1971, the New Education Plan was introduced which pushed the Nepālbhāṣā further back by forcing children to make a choice between Nepālbhāṣā or other languages, science, vocational subjects, mathematics, and so forth.

Nevertheless, Newar intellectuals were trying to encourage loyalty to their mother tongue among the Newars through various literary and cultural organisations. Organising weekly, monthly or yearly literary programmes, celebrating the birthdays of the late Nepālbhāṣā writers, or observing New

Years' day<sup>33</sup>, they were active in promoting language sentiment. Such activities gradually spread from the Kathmandu Valley to many other small and big Newar towns. In a small town like Sankhu, where no literary association existed till the early 1960s a single person, the poet Girija Prasad Joshi (1939-1987) inspired literary and cultural movements. He stimulated many young people to dedicate themselves to the cause of the Nepālbhāṣā. Such literary activities spread to many other Newar settlements in the late 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, motivating many youngsters to work for the promotion of Nepālbhāṣā.

### **The Formation of Nepālbhāṣā Mamkāḥ Khalah (The Association of Newar Speakers)**

The quotation of the Newar poet Siddidas Amatya *Bhāṣā Mvāsā Jāti Mvāi* (If the language survives, the nation will survive) is often quoted in Nepālbhāṣā programmes. However, it took many years for the Newar elites to realise the necessity to unite themselves ethnically. The necessity of Newar unity for the sake of their language and their nation (*jāti*) was repeatedly emphasised by literary elites, but the common Newar people have yet to be convinced. At the same time, the social structure of Newar society do not allow them to unite so easily among themselves. On the one hand unequal division of classes do not permit them to unite and on the other hand their traditional caste distribution divide them heavily. Even in a small town like Sankhu where all inhabitants are Newars, they are not united among themselves. One of the reason is the traditional caste structure. The elaborate caste system of the Newars adds to the complexity of the society. On one hand there is the separation between the different castes, on the other hand there is their interdependency, a paradox existing in the greater part of South Asia. Although, Sankhu is a small town, there are 21 castes, each of them are having their traditional caste bound duties, which also rank them in a hierarchical order. Social division is prevalent because of the caste structure. Especially, to those low caste groups whose traditional duties are being stigmatised it is still hard to provide them with a feeling that each of them are integral parts of Newar national movement. To a certain extent, the feeling of *cvay* (upper) *kvay* (lower), the division between the northern and southern half of the town also divide the Newars among themselves. Small towns like Sankhu or Nala as well as big cities like Kathmandu or Bhaktapur can equally supply such examples of divisions.<sup>34</sup>

In 1979, following the consequences of a students' movement, King Birendra, announced the political referendum on whether to retain the partyless *Panchayat System* with certain reforms, or to re-introduce the multi-party system. In April 1979, all kinds of restrictions against public gatherings

and meetings were lifted. This new situation allowed the Newars to organise themselves in a new way for the cause of their language and national identity. In this regard the formation of the Association of Newar Speakers (*Nepālbhāṣā Mamkāh Khalah*) in August 1979 was a historical step. It was the first time that the Newars expressed themselves in a collective manner and appealed to the Newars for the necessity to obtain rights for their language, cultures and nationality from the state. They categorically rejected the "one language-one nation" policy of the government and urged equal rights to all languages and nationalities of Nepal. Their demands included education in the mother tongue to children, rights for all languages to be used in the court of justice and in administration, access for all languages into the government media, and recognition of the culture of all nationalities.<sup>35</sup>

In the same year, in October/November 1979 the Association organised a big New Year's rally in Kathmandu. The New Year's day was also celebrated in Patan, Bhaktapur and other Newar towns. A motor cycle rally which was organised to observe the New Year's day went outside the Valley through different Newar settlements. In the following years, the New Year's day continued to be celebrated in this manner. This tradition was copied by the Newars of other places. Consequently, in many Newar settlements the Newar people have formed their own ethnic organisations.

In the 1980 referendum, the partyless *Panchayat System* won against the multi-party system and the old language policy continued. No changes took place in favour of the various nationalities and languages. Parties were once again banned and press freedom controlled. However, it had become impossible for the government to go back to the situation preceding the referendum. Parties were allowed to function using the epithet "banned" before their names. Likewise, the Nepalese press tried to continue the freedom which it had acquired during the referendum period. In 1982, the Nepālbhāṣā weekly *Ināp* was launched in Kathmandu.<sup>36</sup> It played a vital role in developing language awareness among the Newars. Its circulation was not limited to the Kathmandu Valley but also reached many other Newar towns outside the valley.

The Association of Newar Speakers assumed greater importance, but because of the autonomous feelings in each place, it did not succeed to bring under its umbrella the organisations outside Kathmandu district.

In 1986, the chairman of the Association of Newar Speakers, Padmaratna Tuladhar stood for the *Rāṣṭriya Pancāyat* (National Assembly) as a multi-party supporter, but he was labelled more as a Newar candidate by those who were against his views on language and ethnic rights. He was successful because of his statements in favour of the multi-party system and ethnic rights in the *Rāṣṭriya Pancāyat* he rapidly gained enormous popularity. This inspired

other ethnic groups of Nepal to establish their own ethnic organisations. In a way the Association of Newar Speakers played a leading role in promoting ethnic awareness in Nepal. In 1986, the Forum for the Rights of All Nationalities (*Sarvajātiya Adhikāra Maṃca*) emerged as a consequence of the joint efforts of individuals of different nationalities to take a collective stand for equal rights of all nationalities, languages, culture and religions. To a certain extent this Association was able to spread ethnic awareness, but it failed to organise different ethnic groups under its umbrella. It soon became inactive and disappeared from the scene.

### Question of Ethnicity in Nepal

The issue of minorities and their rights was ignored or suppressed during the thirty years of *Pancāyat* rule (1961-1990). Soon after the 1990 political change which re-introduced multi-party system in Nepal, the voice of minorities became clearer. Not only the Newars but also many other ethnic groups of Nepal began to organise themselves to promote their rights.

In 1990, the joint effort of different minority groups resulted in a new forum called *Nepal Janajāti Māhāsamgha* (Federation of the Nationalities of Nepal), which began with the participation of eighteen nationalities (Bhattachan 1995: 7). The membership of nationalities increased in subsequent years. The Federation came out boldly in favour of the minorities. In November 1990, Nepal received a new constitution. The new constitution again introduced a multi-party system, and appeared to have a multinational and even a multilingual nature, yet the Nepali language remained the "Rāṣṭra Bhāṣā" "national language" for official use, while other languages were recognised as "Rāṣṭriya bhāṣā" "languages of the nation" on the basis of the article 6 (1) and (2) of the constitution. Article 18 (1) states that all communities living in the Kingdom have the right to preserve and promote their languages, scripts and cultures. Article 18 (2) grants the right to educate children in their mother tongue up till the primary level.<sup>37</sup> As a gesture, the government-owned Radio Nepal allocated 5 minutes per day to each of the 12 languages in broadcasting its news. In 1993, the government itself constituted "The National Languages Policy Recommendation Commission" (Rāṣṭriya Bhāṣā Nīti Sujhāva Āyog). In a report, this Commission supplied many suggestions including the urgency to provide education in various national languages and the use of national languages in local administrations.<sup>38</sup> However, the government implemented none of those suggestions till today.

Nepal is not large in physical shape (spread over 147,181 square kilometres) but it has many ethnic and tribal groups. The 1991 census lists 60 ethnic and caste groups, but this list is not complete: to a certain extent the list is confusing because castes and nationalities are lumped together, as Gurung

(1995: 1-2) has pointed out. As a small state with so many ethnic groups it is not a simple task for Nepal to tackle the rising phenomenon of ethnicity. To develop mutual understanding among the different groups in a multi-ethnic country like Nepal is a real difficult task. At present, many ethnic groups of Nepal feel that they are eclipsed by Khas language and cultural chauvinism. This can only lead to undesirable hostilities.<sup>39</sup> Soon after the 1990 political change, from eastern Nepal one group of Limbus have raised hateful slogans against the Brahmins "*cucco nākha kātaum*" (Slaughter the pointed noses). What kind of situation it might bring if such feelings are fuelled continuously is unpredictable.

The minority groups of Nepal have presented their demands in different ways. However, the nature of their demands is not different in principle. As an example we may consider the demands presented by M.M. Shrestha, the coordinator of the *Nevāh Raṣṭriya Āndolan Samanvay Samiti* (The Newars' National Movement Coordination Committee),<sup>40</sup> which are considered most radical in their view:

1. Right of autonomy for all nationalities in those areas where they have the dense population.
2. A change in the present Upper House of Parliament into a House of Nationalities with equal elected representatives from all small or big national, ethnic or tribal groups irrespective of their number; with this institution having the same power as the House of Representatives.
- 3.1. To replace the article in the constitution giving special status to one language, by an article giving equal rights to all languages of Nepal.
- 3.2. To encourage the use of all languages for communication by the central government.
- 3.3. The right to use all languages in the courts of justice and administration at both the local and central levels.
4. To make education in the mother tongues available from the lower to the highest level.

The general secretary of the Federation of Nationalities of Nepal (*Janajāti Mahāsaṃgha*) Parsuram Tamang brought forward similar demands for the *Tamangs* (Tamang 1992: 25).<sup>41</sup> There are now even more radical organisations like Sadbhāvanā Party (Goodwill Party) of the Tarai or The National Party of the Nationalities (*Rāṣṭriya Janajāti Party*) whose demand is to make Nepal a federal state of different nationalities (Bhattachan 1995: 131-2). The most radical demands came from The All Nepal Nationalities'

Organisation (*Akhil Nepāl Janajāti Saṃgha*), whose demand includes right of secession for all nationalities of Nepal.<sup>42</sup>

Both the right of secession and the right of autonomy, are in great debate among the intellectuals of Nepal at present. From a practical point of view, the right of secession is the most extreme demand to be accomplished in present day Nepal, because Nepal is physically a small country and is situated between two giant countries like China and India. The territorial disintegration of this country can lead it nowhere. To grant autonomy to various ethnic groups may be more practical in Nepal to protect them together with their languages and cultures.<sup>43</sup> However, this is not possible within the present demarcations of districts and villages, which in a quite illogical manner divides minorities into several fragments within their own areas.

For the present purpose it will be interesting to look at the views of the different political parties in Nepal. The Nepali Congress, a major party, thinks that to talk about the problem of nationalities is destructive in Nepal, whereas a rightist party, the *Rāstriya Prajātantra Party*, the Tarai based *Sadbhāvanā Party*, as well as the CPN (UML), talk about the rights of nationalities and languages of Nepal, but fail to implement their programmes on nationalities and languages when they were in power.<sup>44</sup> Recently the CPN (UML) has been split into two factions; the majority faction is carrying same name while the minority faction has named itself CPN (ML). So far, no drastic changes in these two parties are expected pertaining to languages and ethnicity policies. Small Communist Parties such as the CPN (Masāl), CPN (MLM), CPN (Maoist) and Nepali Communist League demand equal rights and autonomy for all nationalities. The CPN (Maoist) even presented radical demands that include the secession right for all nationalities.<sup>45</sup> The All Nepal Nationalities Organisation (*Akhil Nepāl Janajāti Saṃgha*) emerged as a sister organisation of CPN (Maoist).<sup>46</sup> This is a new trend, formerly, no other groups which were active in ethnic movement preferred to link themselves with any political parties of Nepal. Since the Nepalese people from different nationalities are divided into as many factions as there are political parties it is very difficult to predict where this trend will lead them. The existing political parties of Nepal have not yet been able to convince the oppressed nationalities (*janajāti*) in Nepal that they deserve their support. They generally think that slogans presented in favour of nationalities by various political parties are not sincere. This is because the leadership of most political parties in Nepal, including the leadership of the most vocal CPN Maoist is in the hands of Brahmin-Kṣetris, the dominant group of Nepal who speak Nepali, the official language of Nepal.

In the May 1997 local elections, the CPN (UML), which swept a two-third majority in Kathmandu Metropolis, and won the post of both mayor and

deputy mayor, promised to make the Nepālbhāṣā the official language of the municipality. According to their promise, the board of Kathmandu Municipality passed a resolution and declared Nepālbhāṣā a language of the Municipality in addition to Nepali, on 24 July 1997 thus introducing Nepālbhāṣā in Kathmandu Municipality after more than three decades.<sup>47</sup> This example has been followed by other municipalities outside the Valley like Rajbiraj and Dhanusha Municipalities and District Development Committees for Maithili speaking people. At the same time, Nepali speakers in Kathmandu have filed a petition in the Supreme Court against the making of Nepālbhāṣā an additional medium language in Kathmandu Metropolis,<sup>48</sup> and the Supreme Court on 18 March 1998 issued a stay order to Kathmandu Metropolis, Rajbiraj and Dhanusha Municipalities and District Development Committees to refrain from using local languages for official purposes.<sup>49</sup> The Newars have already started their action against the order by organising an action Committee, *Nepālbhāṣā Saṁgharsa Samiti*. In a similar manner, the Mathili speaking people are in action against the order. They also have launched joint action forming an "All Languages Action Committee of Nepal" against the Supreme Court order. We have yet to see what consequences the decision taken by the Supreme Court in favour of the dominant language against the other languages of Nepal may have.

### **Emergence of the Nevāḥ De Dabū, the National Forum of the Newars**

The Newars were busy at their own pace to arrive at a consensus for a national organisation of their own. In February 1991, the *Nepālbhāṣā Pariṣad* (The Council of Nepālbhāṣā) held a two-day conference on the Newar nationality and language.<sup>50</sup> It tried to bring together representatives from different districts of Nepal and discussed government statistics on the Newars as well as the necessity of a Newar national organisation. Besides the Council, *Cvasāpāsā* was functioning as an academy of literature in Nepālbhāṣā, and published many books. With the co-operation of Toyota Foundation, Japan, it has translated many Japanese as well as South Asian literary works into Nepālbhāṣā, Nepali and Maithili. The most important contribution of *Cvasāpāsā* is the Āśā Archives, where more than six thousand old manuscripts have been collected and made accessible to all scholars interested in Nepali history, art, culture, religions, rituals and traditions.<sup>51</sup> In addition to these academic institutions Newar intellectuals founded their own academy the *Nepālbhāṣā Academy* in 1992. The urgency of the time was not only city-centred scholarly associations, but also a mass based organisation which can inspire the new generation of Newar society. It could be achieved only through originating a national Newar organisation.

In October 1992, the second convention of the Association of Newar Speakers was held in Kathmandu, but it became controversial because of the Communist party of Nepal United Marxist Leninist (CPN UML) preponderance.<sup>52</sup> The Association lost credibility because most Newars wanted such organisations to be free from party politics. This resulted in the establishment of another organisation in Kathmandu, the Newars Trust (*Nevāh Guthi*) 1993, with the aim to build a mass-based ethnic organisation. The Trust established branches in many places, but it was again divided into two factions in 1996. Internal divisions developed in the Trust about the location of its office and later developed into a political conflict.<sup>53</sup> Both factions held their central conventions separately in July 1996, thus making it difficult for the trust to maintain itself as a mass-based Newar organisation.

The Association of Newar/Speakers, on the other hand, had long been trying to build a consensus among the Newars to establish a national organisation. In 1992, when its second convention was held in Kathmandu, one of its main targets was to hold a gathering of the Newars to form a national organisation. In December 1994, it held a two-day seminar to discuss the basic requirements for a national convention of the Newars. As a result, they succeeded in forming an ad hoc committee to hold such a national convention. Soon after that, on September 1-2, 1995, it took place in Kathmandu. On its second day it proclaimed *Nevāh De Dabū*, the National Forum of the Newars. The participants from various districts also suggested to make the organisation politically neutral. So they selected a new figure, Bhaktidas Shrestha, a religiously motivated Newar without political affiliations, as chairperson.<sup>54</sup> Five vice chairpersons representing each of the five development regions of Nepal.

### **The Problems of Newar Ethnicity**

With the creation of the National Forum of the Newars, the Newars have shown their eagerness to present themselves as a separate ethnic group or a nation within the modern state of Nepal, a country presenting itself as a single nation-state only during the last few decades.<sup>55</sup> For the present purpose it is important to realise that for the Newars, unlike for other nationalities of Nepal, it is not an easy task to unite and present themselves as an ethnic group. The caste system which once was an essential component of Newar society and culture, is rapidly losing its traditional values. Particularly the so called low-caste people, whose duties are still very important in various festivals as well as in life cycle and death rituals, are nowadays unwilling to continue their tasks. The Newars are known for their rich culture. In most festivals many castes participate and in such festivals each caste has to fulfil its own duties.<sup>56</sup> During the past decades cities like Kathmandu and even



smaller towns such as Sankhu have lost many *guthis* which used to fulfil different duties in different festivals. One of the main factors is economical: as soon as the land reform programme (1964) was implemented, many socio-religious associations (*guthis*) responsible for running such festivals, have partly or completely lost their traditional source of income. Their major income used to come from land endowments but nowadays the tenants are not anymore under their control.

At the same time, the popularity of modern luxuries like the television, video, car, motorcycle, concrete buildings and so on have changed life style of Nepalese in a great deal. Such commodities have become status symbols for most elite Newars, and the new generations are more interested in Western pop culture and Indian cinema than in their own music and culture.

In 1951, as soon as Rana family rule ended in Nepal, the valley of Kathmandu, the principal homeland of the Newars, was opened for the first time to the people from other parts of Nepal and to outsiders. Since then, the migration of people into the valley from other parts of Nepal, and from North India (mainly from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh), has continued. These migrants are going to outnumber and displace the Newars in their own land very soon. The influx of people from all over Nepal and North India, the growth of countless concrete buildings on the fertile land of the Valley, and the sharp increase in highly polluting motor traffic continue to be unchecked. As K.P. Malla observes:

With his social and cultural fabric of life slowly being destroyed, the average middle-class Newar of Kathmandu today feels like the displaced Nawabs of Lucknow after the loot (1992: 24).

A trend of speaking Nepali in Newar houses already started during the Rana period. First it was adopted by members of the Newar elites who used to serve the Rana palaces. After the downfall of the Ranas in 1951, more government aided public schools with Nepali as the medium of instruction were opened. High and middle class Newar parents were more inclined to speak Nepali with their children at the cost of their own mother tongue. They preferred to forsake their language in order to obtain better job opportunities in government service. At present the English language has captured the attention of the Nepalese including the Newars. Newar parents are eager to send their children to so-called English boarding schools which are mushrooming in most cities of Nepal nowadays. In 1991, when the first Nepāl bhāṣā medium school was opened, only a few Newar parents chose to send their children to this school. Most strikingly, most of these Newar

leaders who have been engaged in the Nepālbhāṣā and national movement, did not send their children to the first Nepālbhāṣā medium school either.<sup>57</sup>

The Newars outside the valley of Kathmandu, especially the new generations, have lost their ancestors' language because the trend of speaking Nepali at their home became more common among them. In most cases those Newars can be recognised only by their family or caste names. However, for a decade or so the Newars outside the valley have been attracted towards their past glory and the Nepālbhāṣā. Newars living in many places outside the valley are seeking to learn the Nepālbhāṣā by requesting to accommodate them teachers from the Valley. In the past few years, the Association of the Newar Speakers (*Nepālbhāṣā Maṃkāḥ Khalah*) has sent teachers to various places. Even from Sikkim Newar people have made contact with the Association to acquire Nepālbhāṣā teachers and school textbooks. The Newars of India organised a gathering in Kalimpong for the first time on December 2 and 3, 1995.<sup>58</sup> Even Newars living in the U.S.A. have formed their organisations like *Nepāḥ Pāsā Pucāḥ* (Nepal Friends Association 1991) and *International Nepālbhāṣā Sevā Samiti* (International Nepālbhāṣā Service Committee) and have launched their publications like *Dabu*, *Newāḥ Vijñāna* and *Swonigaa*. They also have initiated websites for a global network of the Newars.

In September 1995, when the National Forum of the Newars was founded, it was joined by participants from 38 districts. Those who participated have formed local organisations in their areas. All these organisations present themselves without any caste bias and try to associate with all Newar castes including the formally untouchable *Poḍe* caste. At the same time, there are some caste-based organisations within Newar society. In Kathmandu the Vajrācāryas (the Buddhist priestly caste), Uray (the Merchant castes like Tulādhar and Kansākār), Mānandhar (Oil pressers), Kapāli (Tailor and Musicians), Khaḍgi (Butchers), Poḍe (Sweepers), Citrakār (painters), as well as Tandukār have had their caste foundations for many years. In 1993 the biggest caste group in Newar society, the Jyāpus, the farmers of the Valley, established the Great Foundation of the Jyāpus (*Jyāpu Mahā Guthi*). At present these caste associations are playing a supportive role in forming Newar unity. The Great Foundation of the Jyāpus in particular is an achievement in itself, because in the past farmers had kept aloof from activities launched by the Newar elites. Virtually, in 1997 the Great Foundation of the Jyāpus (*Jyāpu Mahā Guthi*) split into two factions, however it manage to remain intact<sup>59</sup>. What will be the role of these caste-based organisations in the future is unpredictable since the traditional hierarchical order of castes is no longer appreciated by the depressed caste groups. Whether those caste-bound associations seek their separate identity or will become part of the Newar ethnic movement is not yet clear.

In the recent past, Newar people have been debating the creation of a new party of their own. If we read two Nepālbhāṣā dailies *Sandhyā Times* and *Viśvabhūmī* over the past years, we find a number of articles which indicate this trend. Newar leaders such as Malla K. Sunder, Keshavman Sakya and Nareshbir Sakya advocated the formation of a Newar ethnic party. How effective an ethnically-based party will be is very difficult to assess because even a prominent Newar leader like Padmaratna Tuladhar is not in favour of such a party. From the viewpoint of present politics not only the Newars but all other ethnic groups are divided into as many factions as there are political parties. Shortly before the local election in 1997, *Nevāḥ Rāṣṭriya Āndolan Samanvaya Samīti* (The Newar National Movement Coordination Committee) emerged. It aimed at organising the Newars politically and ethnically to fight for equal rights of their language and nation. However, its attempt to field ethnically motivated candidates in the Kathmandu Valley during the 1997 local elections did not succeed. It was found that the Newar politicians preferred to contest the election according to their political affiliations rather than in ethnic terms.

### Challenges to Newar Ethnicity

Before the Gorkha conquest, the Valley of Nepal was a melting pot for the migrants of the people from the north and south. The culture, language, religions, rituals and traditions of the valley had successfully been assimilating people who had been migrating into the valley for centuries. As a consequence of the Gorkha conquest the assimilation process stopped. Especially after the proclamation of the 1854 legal code, the Newars of the valley were subordinated to the ruling ethnic group, the Parbates.

Even so, the rise of ethnic awareness among the Newars is a relatively new phenomenon. During the Nepālbhāṣā movement of the renaissance period (1899-1940), the writers did not yet perceive a Newar ethnicity. The writers of those days did not promote Newar nationalism as such. Many Newars used to write not only in Nepālbhāṣā but also in Nepali. Many contemporary Nepālbhāṣā and Nepali writers also used to gather at the same place, as is clear by the evidence of Yogvir's cloth shop.<sup>60</sup> The necessity of social reforms mainly motivated Newar writers of those days. With a few exceptions,<sup>61</sup> their writings were a far cry from the modern sense of ethnic awareness. Since education was beyond the reach of the general public, educated people with the ability to read literature were not many. Yet, the Rana government was frightened especially by the Nepālbhāṣā writings, and not so much by other languages. They feared the power of expression against them in that language as it was the language of the majority population of the Valley. Their fear was political and not based on the danger of a language

movement or ethnic uprisings. They suppressed Nepālbhāṣā writers to silence the vocal population of the Kathmandu Valley because they knew that if the people of the Valley would turn against their tyrannical rule, it would become impossible for them to remain in power. For the same reason, the Rana government granted privileges to the Newars by appointing them to administrative, judicial and other posts. These cautious concessions were issued in order to please the Newars so that they would support the Ranas.

As soon as the Rana government adopted a liberal policy towards Nepālbhāṣā publications in 1946, the Newar writers were satisfied. When the 1951 political change gave them more freedom to write and publish books they were very pleased. Against this background it is puzzling that in 1959 Nepali alone was declared the National language of Nepal at the cost of all other languages of Nepal. Later the *Panchayat System* followed the same monolithic policy for 30 years by ignoring the existence of all other languages of Nepal. The continuous deprivation by the State pushed Nepālbhāṣā from the most important language of the country to a minor one.

In spite of the continuous negligence from the side of the State, Newar people have not shown any violent reaction throughout history. The literary activities of several decades assumed an ethnic shape only at the beginning of the 1980s. And even then, it took the Newars 15 more years to create 'The National Forum of the Newars' (*Nevāh De Dabū* 1995). The National Forum still has to gain unanimous support from all Newars. When the preparation for the formation of The National Forum was in progress, one group of Newars, politically close to the *Nepali Congress*, formed the *Prajātāntrik Nepālbhāṣā Khalah* (The Association of Democratic Newars) led by Hitkarvir Sing Kansakar, another well known figure in the Nepālbhāṣā movement. They accused the supposedly national organisation of being controlled by the left, and alleged accusation that the draft constitution of the proposed national organisation was undemocratic because it was written to fulfil the interests of left-inclined Newars.<sup>62</sup>

The National Forum of the Newars was composed of the representatives from various Newar settlements having all sorts of political background. The leaders of the convention claim that the newly formed 'The National Forum of the Newars' should not be controlled by politicians. In 1996, the first regional meeting of the executive body took place in Jhapa, eastern Nepal. The final version of the constitution of The National Forum was also passed on this occasion. Different political leaders, including a Newar *Nepali Congress* leader like Ramhari Joshi participated. The members of the Democratic Newars Association have not yet shown any interest in joining The National Forum. Instead they are trying to create their own separate branches all over the country to create a parallel national organisation. In a similar manner

*Nevāh Guthi* and *Nepāl Nevār Samāj* (The Newar Society of Nepal) and *Nevāh Mahā Guthi* (The Great Trust of the Newars 1997) are also busy in their own way to organise the Newars of the country under their own umbrellas. Whether all these Newar organisations can co-operate with each other or are dividing the Newar national movement into several fragments is an important question today.

As an ethnic Newar national organisation, 'The National Forum of the Newars' must be able to keep equal distance from all political parties. In practice this is the most challenging job for the Newar nationalists; their success or failure depends on it. Examining the differences in political views among the Newars leads to the inevitable conclusion that an ethnic political party is unlikely to be formed in the short run. It is because many Newars are occupying higher and lower posts in almost all big and small political parties of Nepal.

Another major challenge for Newar nationalism is the caste system, which has given the Newars a distinct identity. Since the 1964 legal code has made all castes of Nepal equal before the law, the caste system within Newar society has lost some of its traditional importance. The caste system in Newar society is a delicate phenomenon. On the one hand, caste co-operation is essential for the continuation of Newar cultural tradition, while, on the other hand, the hierarchical order of the traditional caste system is a strong divisive force. During the celebration of traditional feasts, festivals, and rituals, caste-based duties are still very important. In Sankhu, the butcher caste that played music during funeral processions stopped their duties; since then there is no music in the funeral processions, because it is impossible to replace them by any other caste. Nowadays, in growing metropolitan cities like Kathmandu, Patan and Bhaktapur the traditional value of caste does not count for very much, but in a small town like Sankhu caste discrimination is still going on. There, the so-called lowest caste, the *Pode*, and other low caste groups such as *Nāy* and *Jogī*, are still suffering from discrimination. However, from the so-called highest caste (Brahmins) to the so-called lowest caste (*Pode*) all are identified as Newars, because of their culture and language. Still it is a hard task to unite them for the cause of Newar nationalism because their culture is not based on equality among the various castes. Whether the Newars will be able to develop a feeling of equality among all castes or not is a vital question today. The Newars can no longer maintain their cultural traditions if the stigmatised low castes are not treated equally with other high castes. At present, all Newar nationalist organisations are busy trying to accommodate members in their organisations without caste bias. However, the abolition of caste hierarchy in Newar society is not an easy task.

When we talk about Newar national movement it is necessary to take into account the position of women in Newar society. Newar women are being considered one of the most educated and most forward groups in Nepal. However, the conservative Newar society does not permit them to participate in social activities. Most Newar women are being confined to their household duties. The place of women in Newar society is being extremely subordinated to men. Especially, married women are being highly discriminated in their homes.<sup>63</sup> Together with men, it is essential that Newar women also join their hands with their male counter parts to turn their national movement a success. At present, most Newar women are miles away from any such activities. So far, a few city dwelling educated women are being assimilated in different Newar organisations, but their representation is insignificantly low. A few years ago, a group of Newar women founded a Newar Women's Association, the *Nepālbhāsā Misā Khalah* (1989) in Kathmandu, but this Association is mainly concentrated among literary circles than with women. Whether the Newar nationalists will succeed in receiving active support from Newar women or not is an important question, because without an active support from women their movement may hardly achieve a success.

The Valley of Kathmandu is no longer the homeland of only the Newars. People migrated from all over Nepal and India have made them a minority in their traditional homeland. The loss of traditional trade areas as well as that of traditional land ownership have also disrupted Newar society. The Newars, who once were the masters of trade, are no longer in that position. They are being gradually displaced by the Indian merchants and, now, because of the so-called free market economy, Newar traders are losing even more than before. The competition for bread and butter to survive hardly allows them to foster their traditional values. During the past two centuries the Newars of the Valley have also migrated extensively to other parts of the country and beyond. In most areas they need to mix with other ethnic groups, have lost contact with the centre, and may well forget their language and culture. To inspire all these Newars with nationalistic feeling is more or less impracticable.

The growing intrusions of foreign cultures and languages into Newar society might in the long run eliminate both their language and culture. To overcome these challenges, the Newar leaders have not yet made any far-sighted plans and policies.

### **Conclusion**

From the above discussions it becomes clear that the unity of the Newars is being acquired more from their language than from any other factors. The formulation of their unity has much more to do with the cause of language

rights than with ethnic ambition. The Newars' endeavour to form a national organisation could gain momentum only because the state has continuously been neglecting their language. Still the Newars have a long way to go for consolidating a unanimous Newar organisation. In Nepal, after Maithili Nepālbhāṣā is a language with a long tradition of literature, which can easily be made another official language in the Kathmandu Valley. The Newars' attempt to unite ethnically may not be necessary, if Nepālbhāṣā is again recognised as an official language, so that the Newars can use their language in court, in administration of the Valley as well as in education. The recent order of the Supreme Court to refrain from using Nepālbhāṣā in Kathmandu Metropolis, and Maithili from Rajbiraj and Dahnusha Municipalities and District Development Committees is not a good sign. It clearly indicates the sole patronisation of Nepali language against all other languages of Nepal. This sort of circumstances can only provoke non-Nepali speaking people and ultimately may turn very costly to Nepal. In any case, if the right of autonomy to nationalities in Nepal is accomplished, the Newars are at the most favourable place as the major inhabitants of the Kathmandu Valley.

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### Notes

1. According to the population census of Nepal 1991. The census report also shows that the different ethnic groups of Nepal do no longer maintain their mother tongues. The census reports are criticised however by many Nepalese and foreign scholars for not presenting accurate data.

See His Majesty's Government (HMG) (Central Bureau of Statistics) CBS 1995. *POPULATION CENSUS -1991* Table 14 Population by Caste/Ethnic groups/Sex & Age groups for Geographical region (pp. 236-311), see HMG CBS 1993 *POPULATION CENSUS -1991* for population by Mother Tongue, Sex and Age Groups of Development Regions and Districts (page 163-324), see also HMG CBS 1995 *Statistical Year Book of Nepal 1995*. Kathmandu: Central Bureau of Statistics. (pp. 26-40.) For the criticism on the CBS data by various scholars see *Nepal* Vol. 39 no. 58 1991. Shrestha 1999 points out an example of Suntol VDC of Sankhu, where the CBS data deducts almost half of the Newar speakers' number only to add it to the number of the Nepali speakers.

2. Many songs written by the Shah kings are collected in Tuladhar 1981. *Pulāṅgu Mya* (old songs).
3. *Mahāsatvapyākhyān*, a three act play written by King Rajendra, has been published in 1967.
4. Jang Bahadur, a Kunwar, who claims to descent from Ranas of Chittorh became the first Rana prime minister in Nepal. He not only managed to hold on to power for the rest of his life but ensured that it remained with the Kunwars afterward. See Whelpton, J. (1991: 185-97) *Kings Soldiers and Priests Nepalese Politics 1830-1857* Delhi: Manohar.
5. Janaklal Vaidya has written that the prohibition of Newari from the court was already declared in 1854 A.D., but K.P. Malla remarks that the document mentioned by Vaidya unfortunately cannot be traced. He confirms Cittadhar Hridaya's statement about the 1905 ban. See Hridaya, C. 1982 *Jhīgu Sāhitya*. Kathmandu: Nepalbhāṣā Pariṣad p.7, and Malla, K.P. 1978. *Bibliography of Nepalbhasa*. Kathmandu: Layatādabu. p. 5. It is more likely that Jangabahadur may have orally ordered such measures and no written documents were kept. Acarya Narendradev mentions in his book *Baudha Dharma Darśan* (Buddhist Religious Philosophy) the seize of old texts from monastery by the Prime minister Jangabahadur. He further writes a British residential doctor in Kathmandu, (Daniel?) Wright, collected and presented those books to Cambridge University, which were seized from the monastery, and thrown out on the street by Jangabahadur. See [Acarya 1994 (1956): 123]. Delhi: Motilal Banarasidas, see also (Shrestha 1990: 123).
6. See Lienhard 1992(1972). *The Songs of Nepal An Anthology of Nevār Folksongs and Hymns*. Delhi: Motilal Banarasidas p. 4.
7. See Acarya, B. 1953. "Nepāl Nevār and Nevār Bhāṣā" *Nepāl Saṃskritic Pariṣad* 1(1): 1-16. See also Mali, I. 1978. "Nepāl bhāṣāyā Chum Dasu"



- (Some Examples of Newari) in his book *Jhigu Bhay: Jhigu Khamgva* pp. 14-18.
8. For detailed discussion on the word *Nepāl* see Malla, K.P. 1983a. "Nepal Archaeology of the Word" *Nepal Heritage Society Souvenir* PATA Nepal Conference. pp. 63-69.
  9. Vajracarya, D.V. and K.P Malla. 1985. *The Gopālarājavamśāvalī* Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner. pp 121-122.
  10. See Malla, K.P.1983b. "River Names of the Nepal valley: A Study in cultural Annexation." *Contributions to Nepalese Studies*, 10(1-2): 57-68. see also Malla. 1981 "Linguistic Archeology of the Nepal Valley A Preliminary Report" *Kailash* 8 (1-2): 5-23 and Malla 1996 "The Profane Names of the Sacred Hillocks" *CNS* 23(1): 1-9. M. Witzel (1980: 326) also saw the possibility of them being early form of Newari however he preferred to call them "Kirāti."
  11. K.P. Malla (1990: 15-26 ) has analysed the palm leaf from the linguistic point of view.
  12. See Malla *Classical Newari Literature A Sketch* 1982. See also Vaidya and Kamsakār *A Descriptive Catalogue of Selected Manuscripts* 1991.
  13. D. Sakya strongly disapproves to be called 'Newari' to 'Nepālbhāsā'. See Sakya 1997.
  14. Many scholars have discussed this subject. See Doherty (1978: 434), van Kooij *Religion in Nepal* 1978, Gellner *Monk, Householder, and Tantric Priest. Newar Buddhism and its Hierarchy of Ritual* 1996.
  15. See D. Quigley "Ethnicity Without Nationalism: The Newars of Nepal." *Archive European Sociology*. xxviii, 1987: 52-170.
  16. See Giuseppe, F. 1794 "Account of the Kingdom of Nepal" *Asiatic Researches* vol. II, pp. 241-253 Calcutta. (Reprint New Delhi 1970 pp. 307-322), which gives eye witness reports of the barbarous acts of the Gorkha invaders upon the Newars after their victory over Nepal. Kirkpatrick has reprinted extract from Father Giuseppe's "Account of Nepal". See Kirkpatrick 1975(1811): 380-86, Appendix. No. III. However, 20th century Nepali historiographers such as B. Acarya, D.R. Regmi, S. Gyawali dismiss such incidents. But Stiller (1989: 33-34) argues their rejections are not based on evidence and confirms Giuseppe's account. See also Pradhan 1991: 104-5.
  17. Newar settlements like Dolkha already existed outside the Valley from the early Malla period, but extensive migration of the Newars began after the 1769 Gorkha conquest. See Gellner 1986: 102; Lewis and Sakya "Contribution to the History of Nepal: Eastern Newar Diaspora Settlements." *CNS* 15:1, 1988: 25-65.
  18. See HMG CBS Population Census 1991, (1993: 236-311).

19. See also Gellner (1986) for "Language, Caste Religion and Territory: Newar identity ancient and modern." See Rosser. C. 1979 (1966) for "Social Mobility in the Newar Caste system." In C.von Furer-Haimendorf (ed.) *Caste & Kin in Nepal, India & Ceylon Anthropological Studies in Hindu-Buddhist Contact Zones*. New Delhi: East-West Publications, 68-139.
20. For a detailed analysis of the 1854 legal code of Nepal see Hofer (1979). *The Caste Hierarchy and the State in Nepal. A study of the Muluki Ain of 1854*. Innsbruck: Universitätsverlag Wagner.
21. J. Whelpton has discussed in his book about the appointments of Newars in various influential administrative posts. See Whelpton 1991: 165, 203, 228.
22. In December 1885, when the first meeting of the Indian National Congress took place in Bombay only seventy delegates participated. By 1900 the Congress had grown into a position of constitutional opposition to the Government. See Percival, S. 1970 (1960). *A History of India*. Middlesex: Penguin Books. pp. 170-1.
23. The name 'Nepali' was first made popular outside Nepal. Only in the 1930s the rulers of the country recognised it. See Burghart 1996: 253, see also Pradhan 1991: 203. In a similar manner, the word 'Newari' was designated to 'Nepālbhāṣā' by western scholars a long before it was adopted by anybody in Nepal. (See Shakyā 1997).
24. See Tamot, K (1985: 1) *Gadhyaguru Paṇḍit Nisthānanda Vajrācārya va Vayakayā Lalitavistar'* (The Master of Prose: Paṇḍit Nisthananda Vajracarya and His 'Lalitvistar') Kathmandu: Cakanā Sahitya Pālā.
25. For detail see Hridaya 1982: 25-36, see also Tamot 1985.
26. See Kansakar, T. (1997: 11) "The Newar Language: A Profile" *Newāh Vijñāna A Journal of Newar Studies* I(I): 11-37.
27. *Ārya Samāj* is a Hindu reform movement based on Vedānta philosophy. It was established by Svami Dayananda Saraswati in India in 1875 (Percival 1970: 164). In Nepal it was established by Madhavraj Joshi in 1920.
28. For more detail see Hridaya 1982: 83-92, Lakaul 1988, Piwaju and Malla 1984.
29. Nepālī poets like Lekhnath Paudyal, Sambhuprasad, Cakrapani Calise, Laksmiprasad Devakota used to gather in his shop. All of them later became prominent literary figures in Nepali literature. See (Hridaya 1982: 95).
30. For "Brave 'Bir' History of Nepali Literature." see Onta 1996; 37-76.
31. For detail on Dharmadityā see Lakaul 1984: 19-42.

32. Those who were in favour equal rights for other languages, cultures and ethnic groups of Nepal began to call this policy 'Khas chauvinism.'
33. In Nepal, the solar-based Vikram calendar is in official use. The Newar people's New Year celebration is based on Nepāl Samvat or Nepāladesīya Samvat, the 'Era of the country Nepal' as it has been put by the official calendar committee of Nepal. Since it is called Nepāl Samvat their demand is to recognise it as a national era. As the demand came from the Newars it has been labelled as the Nevāri Samvat by many non-Newar people. Nepāl Samvat was founded on Thursday, October 20, 879, and it is believed that the founder was a merchant Śaṃkhadhar at the time of King Rāghavadeva. See Slusser (1982: 389) for more on Nepāl Samvat. See also Vajracarya and Malla (1985: 236).
34. Toffin 1996 draws such examples from ritual and historical contexts, see also van den Hoek 1993.
35. See *Bhintunā Pau*, 1993 a souvenir published by *Nepālbhāṣā Mamkāh Khalah* (NMK), the Association of Newar Speakers.
36. See Shrestha 1995: 448-456 for "Newari Journalism Past present and Future."
37. However, the government does not shoulder any responsibilities to make mother tongue education available to any non-Nepali languages speaking people of Nepal. See *The Constitution of Nepal 1990*. Kathmandu: Ministry of Justice, HMG.
38. See Report of the National Languages Policy Recommendation Commission 1994 (Rāṣṭriya Bhāṣā Nīti Sujhāva Āyog).
39. See Tamang 1987 p. 73, Fisher 1993 p. 11-14.
40. These demands were presented by M.M. Shrestha in a leaflet distributed at the first convention of the Newars on September 1, 1995. See "The Necessity of Newar National Movement and its Path" in *Sandhyā Times*, a Newari daily 1997 May 1, vol.2 no. 179.
41. More on Tamang language situation, see Verenkamp, B.N. 1996 *Tamang Tam A Sociolinguistic Study of Eastern Tamang Dialects (in Nepal)* Kathmandu: CNAS. See also S.K. Sonntag 1995 "Ethnolinguistic Identity and Language Policy in Nepal" for Tamang and Tharu identity.
42. See "Manifesto of The All Nepal Nationalities Organisation" in *Janajāti* 1997 1(1):7-10.
43. More on the autonomy right see Shrestha, M.L. 1998 "Sarbocca Adālatayā Antarim Ādeśa va Jātiya Svaśāsan" (Stay Order of the Supreme Court and the National Autonomy) [in Newari] *Sandhyā Times* April 7-10, .

44. See Shrestha, B. (1990). for "Bāma-Kāmgresa Sarakārayā Bhāṣā Nītiyā Sambhandhay" (A critique on the policy of the united government of Left and Nepālī Congress) [In Newari] *Ināp* 8: 28, 3.
45. See *Janajāti* 1997, 1(1): 8.
46. Although it has still to be proved the CPN Maoist also succeed at forming an association of the Newars, the *Nevāh Khalah*, as its sister organisation. The *Nevāh Khalah* called a Valley banda (strike) on 5 March 1999, it was the first time that an ethnically based organisation called a banda in Nepal. See *The Kathmandu Post* 6 March, 1999.
47. Kathmandu Municipality used Newari as a medium from 1957 to 1961, with the introduction of Panchayat System in 1961 it stopped to do so. (see Shrestha 1996: 2).
48. See Tamot, K. 1997. "On Writ Against Newari in the Court" In *Deṣeymaru Jhyāh* 4:30, 2.
49. See *The Kathmansdu Post*, an English daily, March 19, 1998.
50. The papers and discussions presented at the conference are collected in *Nepāl* 1991, 39: 58.
51. See Vaidya and Kasa 1991, also Sakya 1996.
52. The chairman of the Association P. Tuladhar, who claims to be an independent leftist himself, was close to Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxist Leninist), as a sincere Newar leader he was not that controversial, but in the second convention of the Association when many members of CPN (UML) appeared to capture executive posts it aroused heavy controversy. More about Padmaratna. see Gellner and Sharkey (1996: 37-46).
53. One faction took the flag of the Foundation in a political rally of the Nepali Congress, a major political party of Nepal, which was a new development for the ethnic associations in Nepal. Before this incident there was no evidence of any ethnic organisation taking part in a party politics (see Shrestha, 1996: 2).
54. As an elderly religious man, Bhaktidas Shrestha is not an active person in any political associations, so the Newars' gathering found him uncontroversial to made him the chairman of the National Forum.
55. See Burghart 1996 for "The formation of the Concept of Nation-State in Nepal" in his book *The conditions of Listening. Essays on Religion, History and Politics in South Asia*. (eds ) C.J. Fuller and Jonathan Spencer. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
56. For "Intercaste Relationship in a Newar Community" see Toffin 1978: 461-481.

57. On the first Newari school see Shrestha, B.G. and A.W. van den Hoek 1995. 'Education in the Mother Tongue; the Case of Nepālbhāṣā (Newari)' *Contributions to the Nepalese Studies*. 22:1, 73-86.
58. See news published in *Sandhyā Times* (a Newari daily), December 29, 1995.1: 58.
59. In 1997, one of its dissatisfied member created a parallel Jyāpu Mahā Guthi, later he joined to mother organisation. Personal communication with Dr. Pancha Narayan Maharjan of CNAS, TU who is a member of Jyāpu Mahāguthi.
60. See above note no. 25.
61. See above mentioned (p.11) Siddhidas's quotation.
62. See commentary by Pradip Shrestha, the founder general secretary of *Prajātāntrik Nepālbhāṣā Khalah* and the editor of *Desaymarujhyāh*, a Newari weekly. August 24, 1995, vol. 2 no. 32. This weekly has continuously published views against the left predominance in Newar organisations from the beginning of its publication in 1994. Recently Gellner has lengthily discussed the political affiliations of the Newars. See Gellner 1997 (151-184).
63. For a critical assessment of economical situation of Newar women see K. N. Rankin (1999: chapter 5) *The Cultural Politics of Markets: Economic Liberalisation and the Challenge for Social Planning in Nepal* A Dissertation Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Cornell University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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