



## **Demographic Rhetorics (Ethnic and religious diversity) in Nepal: Ninety Percent Hindus' or Eighty Percent Indigenous Peoples' Population!**

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### **Abstract**

The main argument of this paper is to demonstrate that demographically Nepal does not account for 90 percent Hindu population; Nepal doesn't qualify to be a Hindu State, for there are many other *janajatis or Indigenous Nationalities* (INs), and non-caste peoples in Nepal. By demonstrating different national censuses (of Nepal), I, in this paper, am arguing that the concept of Nepal as the only Hindu state is much more ideological and political, for Nepali society is socially, culturally, and traditionally governed (rather than the religion). I will draw some evidences to illustrate how Hindu state used/uses discourse to distort the identities and agencies of other non-Hindu indigenous peoples. Overall, this paper will unravel the situation by comparing the data of all social groups of the last three national Population and Housing Census conducted with caste/ethnic published in each decennial census, the government's authentic data.

**Keywords:** *Janajati* or indigenous nationalities, four-fold Hindu Verna system, subordination, demographic majority or minority, rhetorics

### **Introduction**

Nepal is ecologically dissected into three regions: Mountain, hill, and Terai. The persistency of the State polity is still a domination of hill high caste groups: Bahun

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(Brahmin) and Chhetri; both of them belong to Hindu hierarchical four-fold caste system. Indigenous Peoples/Nationalities (INs) commonly known as *Janajatis*, Muslims, and Dalits (untouchable groups of Hindu Varna system) are in subordinate position. Hindu religious elite groups are claiming that Nepal is the only country of the world where 90 percent Hindus reside. However, INs also stands against it by counterclaiming that Janajatis' population is more than 80 percent of the national population. The conflict, which is deeply emerging/indulging on the matter of sharing of power, also lies on the rhetoricity of demographic claiming and counterclaiming. As a result, Statistical Bureau is obviously drawn into politics. Nepal is declared as a secular state after the April movement (2006); however, Hindu Nationalists (in Nepal) are arguing that Nepal should be the Hindu nation and state since the Omkar (ॐ) family of Hindu accounts for 94 percent population; so they (Hindu Nationalists in Nepal) argue that the upcoming constitution should declare Nepal as the Hindu state. On the other hand, since with the advent of multiparty democracy in 1990, Janajatis along with Buddhists, Muslims, Christians, and independent human right activists demanded that Nepal should be secular, and any organ or state should not be based on any religion, but it could not be secular at that time. When, Nepal went for a decade long Maoist insurgency and almost 2 hundred and 50 years of Hindu monarchy rooted out, Nepal state become a secular. It strongly indicates that there is an apprehension among common people that religious conflicts and intolerance may increase in the days to come in Nepal.

The principal argument of this paper is to demonstrate that demographically Nepal does not account for 90 percent Hindu population; so Nepal doesn't qualify to be a Hindu State, for there are many other *janajatis or Indigenous Nationalities* (INs), and non-caste peoples in Nepal. Similarly, by demonstrating different national censuses (of Nepal), I am contending that the concept that Nepal is the only Hindu state is much more ideological and political. Nepali society is socially, culturally, and traditionally governed (rather than the religion). In this paper, I will draw some statistics as evidences to illustrate how Hindu state used/uses discourse to distort the identities and agencies of other non-Hindu indigenous peoples. Overall, this paper will unravel the situation at least by comparing the data of all social groups of the last three national Population and Housing Census (PHC) conducted with caste/ethnic published in each decennial census, government's authentic data.

### **Historical Legacy of Present State in Nepal**

As England was a country of English people, traditionally, different regions of Nepal were inhabited and governed by various indigenous communities that were identified by the names of major INs such as Limbuwan in the name of Limbu INs, Khambuwan in the name of Khambu INs, Magaraat in the name of Magar INs, Tamuwan in the name of Tamu (Gurung) INs, Nepala in the name of Newa INs, Khasan in the name of Khas INs, and Jadan in the name of Jad (Bhote) INs and so on. Historically, when these regions or INs were dominant, there were no Hindus (Bahuns, Chhetris, Baisyas, and Sudras) as they are now; there was mostly INs. Later, after the first millennium when Mughals invaded Hindus in northern India, they fled to northern hills (i.e. Nepal) to take a refuge where they gradually divided the society and created caste system constituting social groups in different hierarchies such as Bahun (as the highest caste), followed by Chhetri

(second highest one), Baisya (third one), and Sudra, the untouchable the last one (see Bista, 1994).

Historically, the valley (Kathmandu, Bhaktapur, and Lalitpur), popularly known as Nepal *khaldo* (valley) was believed to have been a lake where Mañjuśrī cut the gorge at Chovar to drain it (lake) out. Then the lake changed into a rich alluvial soil that attracted the first agricultural peoples from the hills. People who inhabited the Nepal *khaldo* were/are called Newar<sup>†</sup>. The valley was/is surrounded by the hills and was inhabited by a large group, *Tamang*<sup>‡</sup>; this region is called Tamangsaling (bordered by Budhigandaki River in the west and Dudhkoshi River in the east, Himalaya in the north and Chure Hill in the South). In terms of hilly settlements, from Dudhkoshi River to Arun River, there were more than three dozens of different *Kirats*<sup>§</sup> called Naulakh (nine lakh) Kirats who were historically known as Khambuwan or *Majhkirat* (middle Kirat). Then from the Arun river to Tista river (to the eastern part of Nepal to part of Shikkim province, India) was known as pallo kirat (thither Kirat), ruled by 10 hang chieftains popularly known as Limbuwan,<sup>\*\*</sup> the homeland of Limbus (indigenous peoples). However, the Sughauli treaty between Nepal Government and the East India Company maintained the Mechi River the eastern border of Nepal in 1816. So, some part of the Limbuwan was left to the East India Company, currently some parts of Sikkim province and Darjeeling autonomous hill council of West Bangal Province, India.

Similarly, to the west of Kathmandu valley, the Magar<sup>††</sup> inhabited Gandaki (lower hill with a confederation of Bahra Magarat--Twelve clans, along lower Kaligandaki); then Gurung inhabited the higher region, a league of GyuRong (Nine Chiefs) (Gurung, 1986). Apart from these hilly settlements, the southern part comprised about 18 percent of land, which is currently known as Terai (Madhesh) that was covered by the dense forest known as *Charkoshe ban/jhadi*. In this area, more than a dozen of Tharus (INs) and other ethnic groups resided. Terai symmetrically stretched from east to west with a dense-forest land known as *Charkoshe Ban/jhadi*. A map of Nepal stretched by renowned geographer late Harka Gurung (1986) clearly illustrates the settlements of INs entities in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century when Gorkha principle state expanded.

There is a hot debate in Nepal that on what basis the federal units have to be designed. There are different types of argument regarding designing the federal units. One of them argues that the identity of historical territories of INs should be taken as the prime importance. The marginalization of those respective groups is becoming an important issues, the formation of federal units based on such entities will address the

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<sup>†</sup>The Newars are the "traditional" inhabitants of the Kathmandu Valley where it is etymologically identical with the place name "Nepal" (Shrestha, 1999). It is recognized as one of the indigenous nationalities of Nepal. However, it is the multiethnic, multi-religious, and multiracial, monolingual group built as the melting pot due to the migration towards Kathmandu valley.

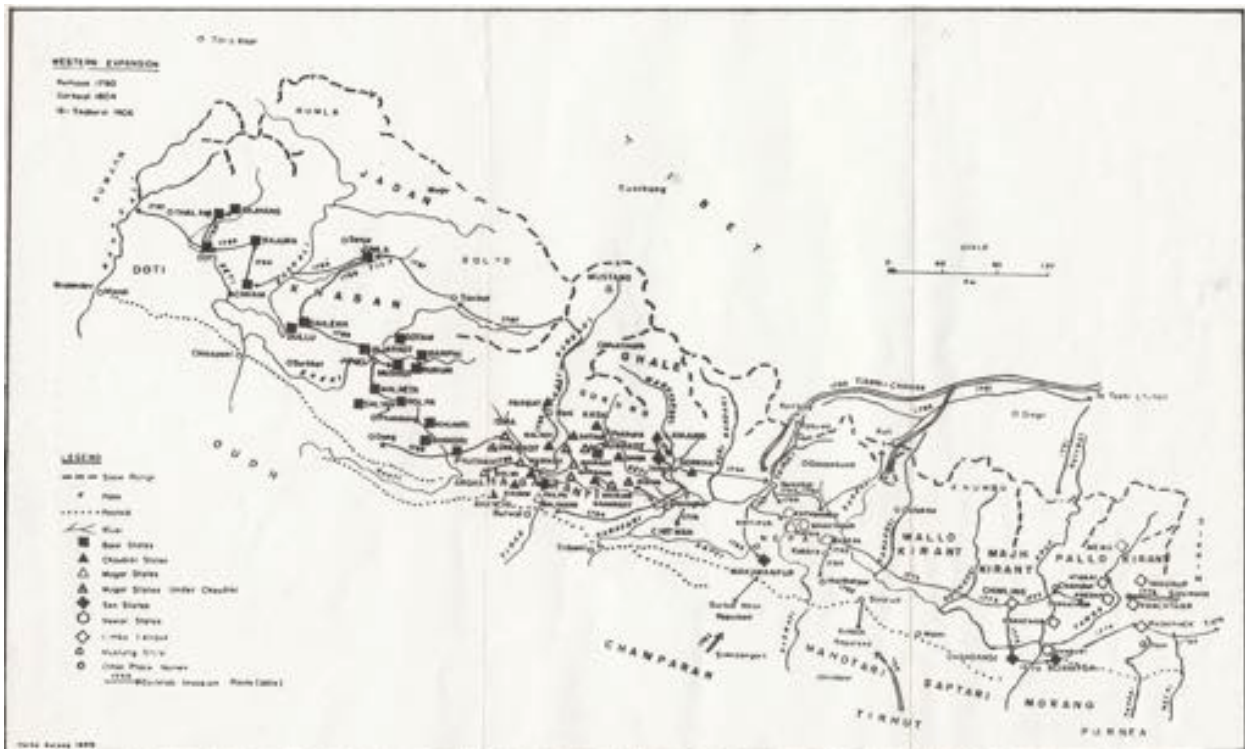
<sup>‡</sup>According to Holmberg (1989, p.15) Murmi people later to become Tamang and they were incorporated into the sate as a subjugated populations; there were marked off from other groups in Nepal as th consumers of beef and particularly carrion beef; and they were associated with lamas as Buddhism.

<sup>§</sup>East of the Nepal valley was the Koshi basin inhabited by various Kirant tribes also known as Khambu in Tamba Koshi and Arun Rivers, and Limbu inhabited in east of Arung (Chemjong, 1966 3rd ed.)

<sup>\*\*</sup> Limbuwan (Campbell, 1869)

<sup>††</sup>According to Bista (7th edition 2000), the original home of the Magars was called Barha (Twelve) Magarat, the twelve regions of Magars, which include all of the hill districts of Lumbini, Rapti, and Bheri zones. Magars constitute the largest number of Gurkha soldiers outside Nepal.

marginalization issue to some extent. There are various arguments for and against of it, but by this measurement a persisting conflict of Hinduization and Indigenization that is taking place in federalization of Nepal would be solved. The opponents are arguing that the respective group doesn't have the population more than 50 percent shows the federal units to be devised based on INs historical territory is very unlikely. However, many scholars argue that any state or sub-state where a single group has an overwhelming majority, there would be a problem emerged as minority and majority syndrome. That eventually creates the tensions between different groups. Rather minorities at present in a unitary state get automatically significantly visible size when federal units are crafted based on identity.



Map of Nepal: Conquest of Gorkha, 1744-1814 (adopted from Gurung, 1986)

The State Restructuring and Division of State Power Committee (SRDSPC) of first Constituent Assembly (CA) held in Nepal (2008-2012) unanimously decided the basis of federal units as “identity” and “Viability.” The committee also decided 14 provinces with simple majority members of the committee. However, the conflict goes on in “naming” and “number” of federal units that should create along with historical, cultural, linguistic, and demographic line and settlement in order to address the historical, cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic deprivation and injustice. Opponents are trying to create a unit by mixing different entities as much as possible so that a domination of a so-called mainstream history, culture, language, and socio-economic measures compatible for a particular group intends to continue even in federal

measures is served in one way or other. The counter argument that ignores the inequalities due to lack of identity, representation, and accessibility into the state are overlooked via “viability” of a federal unit. It is said that the present economic condition would sustain a few federal units based on region. However, it is remarkable here to say that the committee (SRDSPC) crafted 14 federal units on the basis of identity (ethnic) and their demographic presence at village level (as 2001 census recorded).

### **Myth of Hindu Kingdom as a Modern Nation State in Nepal**

Prior to the emergence of Prithivinaran Shah, Sen Dynasty overran different strata of both inner Terai and Terai, stretched from west to east and that they competed for the *Hindu Pati* (Head of Hindus). The Prime Minister Junga Bahadur Rana introduced *MulukiAin* (Civil Code) in 1854 based on the basis of casteism to enforce Hindu culture, religion, and values through statutory provisions in the society. Following this, King Mahendra Shah made sure that traditional practices were maintained by promulgating legal instruments (Hofer, 1979). It suggests that the caste system was strictly imposed upon both Hindus and non-Hindus. For example, people were/are ranked into the higher or lower position by virtue of the birth as mentioned earlier (Bahun as the highest caste, Chhetri as the second highest caste, Baisya as the third one, and Sudra as the lowest one); lower caste peoples could be enslaved for certain crimes, while the higher rank, Bahun could only be downgraded on account of committing various kind of crimes. There was also a gradation of fines and punishments in legal code based on the caste system. Although the country code imposed based on Casteism was uprooted in 60s (AD), the discriminatory practices, Hindu social values once inscripted in country code left a deep social law and order in the society, and such discriminatory practices prevails at present as well. To bring a vivid example, recently, a dalit (Sudra) family was threatened to death if they disobeyed the Hindu social laws and orders (based on hierarchical Hindu ideology). Dalits were used to build a temple of a village; or Dalits were the ones who built the temple in Gulmi district, Nepal. And the initial concept was that all Hindu religious people would be able to worship at the temple; later, Bahun-Chettri prohibited them (Dalits) from worshipping in the temple; and Dalits were threatened to death if they entered the temple to worship the god/goddesses (NayaPatrika, 2014).

More importantly, ethnicity in Nepal cannot be understood apart from the external political factors that have impinged on villagers' lives. Nepal is a country that set out to create a national caste hierarchy and consciously legislated ethnic identities. The state also discriminated against its citizens on the basis of their caste and ethnicity though the combinations of idiosyncratic group circumstances and case-specific policies produced diverse accommodations between the two: caste and ethnicity (Levine, 1987, p. 86). The discrepancy persistently exists even today though Nepal is declared a secular state. Therefore, population characterized with Hindu religion is ideologically and politically claimed to be more than 90 percent. I will discuss it in detail in the following section.

## Rhetoric of Ninety Percent Population: Hindus?

Who are Hindus? The term “Hindu” derived from *Sindhu* or *Indus*<sup>‡‡</sup>; the people who lived in the vicinity of this area (Sindhu/Indus) were called Hindus. Al-Hind is an early Arabic term (used by Muslims) to denote the area and its population; later, Hind changed into Hindus. It is also believed that the term “Hindu” emerged out of two cultures: Occidental and Oriental. For example, Hawley (1991) argues that Hinduism—the word, and perhaps the reality too—was born in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a notoriously illegitimate child—the father was middle-class and British, and the mother, of course, was Indian. So, it could be European Orientalism of the eighteenth century, which gradually developed as “Hinduism,” so fair to say that Hinduism could be a product of Orientalism, as the colonial imaginary and Indian beliefs and practices (see Van Der Veer, 1999). Nadkarni (2004) argues whatever term, Hindu we use and howsoever we define it; there was a continuous and dynamic religion having a history of no less than 4,000 years. And it is also believed that foreign travellers used the term much earlier to describe all non-Muslim Indians in India.

Despite many interpretations, it is plainly understood that the people who accept to belong to (or fall) in the four fold systems such as Bahun, Chhetri, Baishya, and Sudras are Hindus. However, later Hindu Bahun-Chhetri politicalize the concept of “Hindu”; hence “Hindu” becomes much more political and ideological. For instance, World Hindu Federation (2006) defines:

Hindu means the pursuers of the Vaidic, Buddhist, Sikh, Janin, Naga and other Hindu culture who accept the following code of conduct: keeping faith in and reverence for Omkar; not killing the cow and her progeny; keeping faith in the... rebirth; devoting the moral, righteous and spiritual aspects of non-violence, truthfulness, non-stealing, celibacy, and non-acquisitiveness; and dedication and commitment to the promotion of unity, good faith, coordination, oneness, and cooperation among the pursuers of Hindu.

Most of the Himalayan/hill inhabitants are Buddhists; the groups include Sherpa, Bhote, Thakali, Hyolmo, Dolpo, Dhokpya, Walung, Tokpegola, and Shingsaba, etc.; the Buddhists in the mountain are culturally beef consumers. Among other hill groups Gurung, Dura, and Lapcha are Buddhist as well, but they do not eat beef. And, Tamang, one of the largest INs (of Hilly region) are Buddhist by religion also consume beef. Similarly, in Terai none of the groups culturally consume beef except Muslim (in Nepal).

Morphy, Sanders, and Taylor (2007) argue that census statistics are also powerful numbers that governments frequently use in the allocation of important

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<sup>‡‡</sup>The settlements that cover a remarkable area in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and north-western part of India of today were known as the Indus civilization. It is believed that when Europeans invasion India and they pronounced the inhabitants along the Indus River was Hindus. So, Hindu word came from the Indus River.

resources such as seats in parliament or shares of expenditure between jurisdictional areas. Moreover, they can be used to characterize social and economic situations among groups of people, and through that to drive important public policy debates. The question of ninety percent Hindus does have a legacy of previous regime one hand, and the capturing of services, resources, and opportunities that is vested in the state is also inherently motivated, on the other hand. Who gets what, when, and how from governments is often informed—if not determined—by what census statistics reveal about existing and projected numbers of people and their socioeconomic characteristics. Sadly, the state often took the data on Caste and Ethnicity, but never published publicly until 1991; it rather adversely claimed that the 90 percent population of Nepal is Hindu. Furthermore, during the Census enumeration, World Hindu Federation used to argue that the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) should not collect the data based on language, religion, caste, and ethnicity since it would disintegrate the nation. There is a tendency that most of the literary writings of Scholars (Bhattachan, 2008; Mabuhang, 2010) mostly of the INs side often claimed that the Census data are not representative, so we believe that census data is *mithyank* (fake numbers) rather than *tathyank* (true numbers).

World Hindu Federation (WHF) mentions in its constitution that the Omkar family constitutes Buddhists and Naga, which is absolutely untrue. The Bahun-Chhetri ideology, therefore, misrepresents the indigenous peoples and also distorts the identities of Nepali indigenous and minority peoples. As I mentioned elsewhere Nepali Bahun-Chhetri constantly colonizes minorities culturally, religiously, and linguistically (to mention a few) in Nepal. For instance, Nepal is constitutionally declared a “secular state,” but since Bahun-Chhetri have political, economic, and military/police powers, they both implicitly and explicitly humiliate, dominate, and control the indigenous and minority peoples.

The interim constitution has decided that Nepal is a secular nation; it doesn't have any specific (mono-centric) religion. On the other hand a couple of men from Tamang Community were taken into custody simply for their killing a calf (for meat). So, it is ironic that Bahun-Chhetri do not allow the indigenous peoples to exercise even the given rights. Pertaining to this incident, National Human Rights Commission and Human Rights activists are found to be silent because people who work for these organizations belong to the Bahun-Chhetri communities. As Bahun-Chhetri (Hindu government) favor one group of people over the others and so called human rights institutions (also populated by Bahun-Chhetris), dozens of indigenous people are still in the prison for their killing calf for the religious, cultural, and meat purposes.

Similarly, recently (in 2014), seven policemen, under the command of Assistant Sub-inspector Govinda Acharya, arrived at the Village Development Committee, a Tamang community and accused them of killing cow/ox. The police opened fire and demanded a bribe of Rs. 15,000 to stop the investigation. The Tamang indigenous peoples refuted the accusation and also refused to give money to the police. It turned into a violent clash between police and villagers (Hong-Kong based Asian Human Rights Commission, 2014). Many such incidents suggest that since police, army, and bureaucrats have the support from the Hindu government (i. e. Nepali government), Hindu police, army, and bureaucrats (including general Hindu Bahun-Chhetris) do whatever they want to do and say against the Nepali indigenous peoples.

There is also a significant population of Muslim in Nepal. Dastidar (2000) argues that the Muslim minority of Nepal, especially in the Terai region face a dilemma because they no longer wish to accept their inferior status in the society, but when they raise their voice for their identity, it results in hostile environment. In other words, when Muslims raise their voices for their identities, Hindu fundamentalists always try to suppress their demands. Similarly, Christians also faced and still face religious issues under Hindu government in Nepal. The autocratic rule of Panchayat system initiated by King Mahendra was the most difficult time for the Christian community, for the constitution of 1962 of Nepal strictly prohibited the practice of Christianity. The Hindu government persecuted many Christians, and this became more severe in the mid 1980s.

During Panchayat regime, the CBS had affirmed 90 percent Hindus' population constituted a bulk of the population who were orthodox Hindus. Largely Nepali people have a difference by social groups: jat (caste), jati (ethnicity), and janajati (Indigenous Nationalities) rather than religion. The important point here is that Nepalis, as I have stated above, have never been orthodox nor are they ever likely to be. The Hindu State falsely creates knowledge that everyone who lives in Nepal is Hindu, which is always ideological, hegemonic, and political. Such Hindu Bahun-Chhetri ideology always distorted the cultural, linguistic, and religious identities of Nepali indigenous peoples.

The 1991 census for the first time revealed that the Bahun's population accounts for about 14.3 percent; following this, the 2001 census shows 13.7 percent; and 13.1% by 2011's census. Over the last three decades, the Bahun's population is decreasing; and the population of Chhetri is more or less remains one fifth of the total population over the last 3 decades. In comparison to Bahun and Chhetri, the population of Baishya category is slightly increasing from 10.1 percent to 12.5 percent in 1991 and 2011 respectively; whereas the population of Dalit remain constant 13 percent of the total population over the three decades. In aggregation, the total population of social groups account for Hindu religions is 59.9 percent in 1991 against 59.7 percent in 2011.

Table 1: Population of Hindu Four-Fold, Caste Group in three Successive National Censuses

SN	Four-fold, Caste Grs	Census, 1991		Census, 2001		Census, 2011	
		Number	*%	Number	%	Number	*%
	<b>Brahman</b>	<b>2634059</b>	<b>14.25</b>	<b>3121015</b>	<b>13.73</b>	<b>3456756</b>	<b>13.05</b>
1	Brahman - Hill	2388455	12.92	2,896,477	12.74	3,226,903	12.18
2	Brahman - Terai	162886	0.88	134,496	0.59	134,106	0.51
3	Kayastha	53545	0.29	46,071	0.20	44,304	0.17
4	Marwadi	29173	0.16	43,971	0.19	51,443	0.19
	<b>Chhetri</b>	<b>3606861</b>	<b>19.51</b>	<b>4,303,399</b>	<b>18.93</b>	<b>5,249,100</b>	<b>19.81</b>
1	Chhetri	2968082	16.05	3,593,496	15.80	4,398,053	16.60
2	Thakuri	299473	1.62	334,120	1.47	425,623	1.61
3	Sanyasi/Dasnami	181726	0.98	199,127	0.88	227,822	0.86
4	Kathabaniyan	101868	0.55	126,971	0.56	138,637	0.52
5	Rajput	55712	0.30	48,454	0.21	41,972	0.16
6	Dhunia	NR	0.00	1,231	0.01	14,846	0.06
7	Dev	NR	0.00	NR	0.00	2,147	0.01



	<b>Vaishya</b>	<b>1872404</b>	<b>10.13</b>	<b>2,839,132</b>	<b>12.49</b>	<b>3,312,742</b>	<b>12.50</b>
1	Yadav	765137	4.14	895,423	3.94	1,054,458	3.98
2	Teli	250732	1.36	304,536	1.34	369,688	1.40
3	Koiri/Kushwaha	205797	1.11	251,274	1.11	306,393	1.16
4	Kurmi	166718	0.90	212,842	0.94	231,129	0.87
5	Kalwar	162046	0.88	115,606	0.51	128,232	0.48
6	Kewat	101482	0.55	136,953	0.60	153,772	0.58
7	Kumhar	72008	0.39	54,413	0.24	62,399	0.24
8	Kanu	70634	0.38	95,826	0.42	125,184	0.47
9	Halwai	44417	0.24	50,583	0.22	83,869	0.32
10	Rajbhar	33433	0.18	24,263	0.11	9,542	0.04
11	Sonar	NR	0.00	145,088	0.64	64,335	0.24
12	Hajam/Thakur	NR	0.00	98,169	0.43	117,758	0.44
13	Sudhi	NR	0.00	89,846	0.40	93,115	0.35
14	Lohar	NR	0.00	82,637	0.36	101,421	0.38
15	Nuniya	NR	0.00	66,873	0.29	70,540	0.27
16	Badhaee	NR	0.00	45,975	0.20	28,932	0.11
17	Barahee	NR	0.00	35,434	0.16	80,597	0.30
18	Kahar	NR	0.00	34,531	0.15	53,159	0.20
19	Lodh	NR	0.00	24,738	0.11	32,837	0.12
20	Bin	NR	0.00	18,720	0.08	75,195	0.28
21	Gaderi/Bhedihar	NR	0.00	17,729	0.08	26,375	0.10
22	Nurang	NR	0.00	17,522	0.08	278	0.00
23	Mali	NR	0.00	11,390	0.05	14,995	0.06
24	Kamar	NR	0.00	8,761	0.04	1,787	0.01
25	Koiree	NR	0.00	NR	0.00	12,276	0.05
26	Sarbaria	NR	0.00	NR	0.00	4,906	0.02
27	Amat	NR	0.00	NR	0.00	3,830	0.01
28	Dhankar/Dharikar	NR	0.00	NR	0.00	2,681	0.01
29	Dhandi	NR	0.00	NR	0.00	1,982	0.01
30	Kalar	NR	0.00	NR	0.00	1,077	0.00
	<b>Shudra (Dalit)</b>	<b>2312194</b>	<b>12.50</b>	<b>2,617,767</b>	<b>11.51</b>	<b>3,509,158</b>	<b>13.24</b>
1	Kami	963655	5.21	895,954	3.94	1,258,554	4.75
2	Damai	367989	1.99	390,305	1.72	472,862	1.78
3	Sarki	276224	1.49	318,989	1.40	374,816	1.41
4	Chamar	203919	1.10	269,661	1.19	335,893	1.27
5	Musahar	141980	0.77	172,434	0.76	234,490	0.89
6	Mallaha	110413	0.60	115,986	0.51	173,261	0.65
7	Dusadh/Pasawan	93242	0.50	158,525	0.70	208,910	0.79
8	Dhobi	76594	0.41	73,413	0.32	109,079	0.41
9	Khatwe	66612	0.36	74,972	0.33	100,921	0.38
10	Badi	7082	0.04	4,442	0.02	38,603	0.15
11	Gaine	4484	0.02	5,887	0.03	6,791	0.03
12	Tatma	NR	0.00	76,512	0.34	104,865	0.40
13	Bantar	NR	0.00	35,839	0.16	55,104	0.21
14	Chidimar	NR	0.00	12,296	0.05	1,254	0.00
15	Dom	NR	0.00	8,931	0.04	13,268	0.05
16	Halkhor	NR	0.00	3,621	0.02	4,003	0.02
17	Natuwa	NR	0.00	NR	0.00	3,062	0.01
18	Rajdhob	NR	0.00	NR	0.00	13,422	0.05
	<b>Others</b>	<b>644715</b>	<b>3.49</b>	<b>187330</b>	<b>0.82</b>	<b>292923</b>	<b>1.11</b>

1	Bangali	7909	0.04	9,860	0.04	26,582	0.10
2	Punjabi	9292	0.05	3,054	0.01	7,176	0.03
3	Terai Others	627514	3.39	1,015	0.00	103,811	0.39
4	Dalit Others		0.00	173,401	0.76	155,354	0.59
	Total of Caste	1107023	59.87	13068643	57.48	15820679	59.71
		3					
	Total of Nepal	1849109	100.0	22736934	100	26494504	100.00
		7					

Note: - 1. NR stands for not reported in the Census.

2. \*Percent given in the column is of the national account

Source: CBS, 1993; CBS, 2003; and CBS, 2013

There are 30 Hindu Caste groups recorded in 1991 census that has increased up to 58 groups in 2011 (Table 2). The increment occurred in the Terai caste and Terai Dalit whereas the hill caste and hill dalit remain constant 4 groups and 5 groups respectively (Sharma, 2014). Although many groups and individual people do not believe that national censuses bring a reliable data. However, census is the only one largest data source that has been disaggregated data by caste, ethnic groups, mother tongue and so on decennially since 1991. There are two interesting phenomena observed that the social groups increasing within the Hindu caste group mainly in Madhesi (Terai) over the three decennial censuses. The reason is not known; however, certainly it indicates something related to the social, cultural, and political subjugation or suppression.

Table 2: Social Groups by Ecological Regions and Decennial Censuses

Broader Categories	1991	2001	2011	(2011-1991)
Hindu Caste	30	51	58	28
Hill Caste	4	4	4	0
Madhesi (Terai) Caste	16	32	34	18
Hill Dalit	5	5	5	0
Madhesi (Terai) Dalit	5	10	15	10
Indigenous Nationalities	26	45	64	38
Mountain Ins	3	5	9	6
Hill Ins	11	20	34	23
Inner Terai Ins	7	7	7	0
Madhesi (Terai) Ins	5	13	14	9
Others	4	4	3	-1
Hill	1	1	0	-1
Terai	3	3	3	0

Source: CBS, 2011; Adopted from Sharma (2014)

## Eighty Percent Population: Indigenous Peoples?

Who are Indigenous Peoples? The indigenous peoples are the ones who lived in the territories before the new settlers arrived and invaded the territories. The well known indigenous peoples, in the world, among many are the native Americans (Indians) and Inuit in North America, the Aborigines in Australia, the Maori in New Zealand, the Sami in Scandinavia, the Inuit in Greenland, the Ainu in Japan, the schedule tribes in India, the tribes in Africa, and the Janajatis (adibashi) in Nepal etc. In the past, Indigenous peoples were considered to be temporary society; therefore, they would be assimilated into dominant mainstream group. Different countries have attempted to strip IPS of their rights of self-determination, their land rights, practices of their traditional culture, languages, and religions across the world. However, IPs who are in many ways distinct and different groups from the mainstream groups; they have their own world vision about the land, property, and ownership, etc. Today, many countries around the world at least in principle, accept the idea that indigenous peoples will exist in the indefinite future as distinct societies within the larger country, and that they must have their land claims, cultural rights (including recognition of customary law) and self governing rights to mention a few.

The origin of terms *Adibashi* (Indigenous) and *Janajati* (nationality) might go back to Shanskrit, Hindi, and Arabic. According to *Nepali Brihat Sabdakosh* (a Nepali revised dictionary 1960s) *Adibasi* (Indigenous) refers to "ethnic group living from time immemorial" and *Janajati* (nationality) refers to "people like Naga<sup>§§</sup>, Koche-Kusunda<sup>\*\*\*</sup>, who are backward people or not civilized and illiterate peoples." The dictionary further explains that *Adibasi* and *Janajati* "rely on shifting/Swidden farming and do not interact with ... local environment; a distinct and different human society." On the other hand, Nepal Federation of Nationalities (NEFEN) in 1991 defined Indigenous Peoples as Nationalities (Janajatis) as "... a community with its own mother tongue and traditional culture ... [that does not fall] under the traditional four-fold varna of Hindu Varna system."

In the groundbreaking report that was published in 1987, the U.N. special rapporteur Jose Martinez Cobo (1986) concluded that the definition of indigenous is:

Indigenous communities, peoples and nations are those which, having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sections of societies once prevailing in those territories or parts of them. They form at present non-dominant sectors of society and are determined to preserve, develop and transmit of future generations their ancestral territories, and their ethnic identity, as the basis of their continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions and legal systems.

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<sup>§§</sup> Naga people refers to a conglomeration of several tribes inhabiting the North Eastern part of India and north-western part of Burma. The tribes have similar cultures and traditions, and form the majority ethnic group in Nagaland, Manipur, Arunchal Pradesh, and Assam.

<sup>\*\*\*</sup> Koche, and Kusunda are two INs out of 59 groups recognized in Nepal

According to a number of international legal instruments, Indigenous Peoples are entitled to the right to self-determination; however, rights of indigenous peoples have been denied for years and decades.

Furthermore, following the INs movement, the government formed the National Committee for Development of Nationalities (NCDN). It defined janajatis as “Nationality” (Janajati) that has its own mother tongue and traditional culture and also do not fall under the conventional four-fold Varna of Hindu or Hindu caste hierarchies. In short, Janajati group has the following characteristics:

- A distinct collective identity
- Own language, religion, tradition, culture and civilization; own traditional egalitarian social
- Traditional homeland or geographical area
- Written or oral history
- Having “we-feeling”;
- Have had no decisive role in politics and government in modern Nepal;
- Who declare themselves as Janajati"

The NCDN was a temporary measure the state adopted until the NFDIN would be formed by promulgating an Act. In order to form the NDIN, the state had formed a task force that had suggested the NFDIN with a clear definition of Janajatis marking that Janajati is defined as those communities who are different from the fourfold Hindu varna system. The fundamental normative principle of Janajatis left out when the Act of NFDIN promulgated in 2002. According to National Foundation for Development of Indigenous Nationalities (NFDIN) Act- 2002, *adivasi/janajatis* “a tribe or community as mentioned in the schedule [of the Act] having its own mother tongue and traditional rites and customs, distinct cultural identity, distinct social structure and written or unwritten history” (NFDIN, 2003).

One of the important concept to understand here is that *Janajatis* are not Hindus intrinsically, and culturally; however the state has taken them as a low grade *mashine* (enslavable) Hindus in country code of 1854 A.D. Janajatis’ significant population have been reported as Hindus, since the State was proclaimed as Hindu kingdom and to make up the 90 percent Hindus population in Nepal, they have been taken as Hindu religious population. This setting has been changed now (in 2001 Census) especially from the East. Limbu Janajati has reported that more than 86 percents of its population are Kirat, followed by Yakkha (81%), Rai (71%), in 2001.

The Census of 2011 reported that out of 26.5 million population, the INs accounts for about 9.5 million (35.8%); whereas as the census of 2001 demonstrated that out of 22.7 million, there were 8.5 million INs (37.2%) and census of 1991 pointed out that out of 18.5 million, there were 6.5 million INs (35.6%) (for detailed information see table - 4).

As in Hindu Caste Groups, there is a severe problem in INs as well. There are problems related to whom? How? And Why? Some groups are indigenous against others. For example, hill Hindu Brahman, Chhetree, Sansyashi, and Dalit also show their apprehension against the indigenous peoples’ movement and the recognition the state made as INs, so that they are also demanding to recognize INs, and they have been raising these issues. However, with the above mention definition many groups

claimed that they belong to Janajatis (INs). There are altogether 64 groups claimed that they are INs by 2011 national census, followed by 45 groups in 2001, and 26 groups in 1991 (see Table 2).

Table 3: 59 *janajatis*(Indigenous Nationalities) Schedule in the NFDIN Act (2002)

1	Kisan	2	Kumal	3	Kushbadiya
4	Kusunda	5	Gangai	6	Gurung
7	Chepang	8	Chantyal	9	Chairotan
10	Jirel	11	Jhangad	12	Dolpo
13	Tangbe	14	Tajpuriya	15	Tamang
16	Tingaule	17	Topkegola	18	Thakali
19	Thami	20	Tharu	21	Thudam
22	Danuwar	23	Darai	24	Dura
25	Dhanuk (Rajbanshi)	26	Dhimal	27	Newar
28	Pahari	29	Phree	30	Bankariya
31	Baramo	32	Bahragaule	33	Bote
34	Bhujel	35	Bhote	36	Magar
37	Majhi	38	MarphaliThakali	39	Mugali
40	Meche (Bodo)	41	Yakkha	42	Rai
43	Raute	44	Rajbanshi (Koch)	45	Rajhi
46	Larke	47	Limbu	48	Lapcha
49	Lhopa	50	Lhomi (Shingshawa)	51	Walung
52	Byashi	53	Sherpa	54	Santhal
55	Siyar	56	Sunuwar	57	Surel
58	Hayu	59	Hyolmo		

Source: NFDIN (2004)

This clearly indicates that the increasing number of self-identification of *Janajatis* (INs) has two meanings. First, since they were subjugated/assimilated into different dominant identity is tend to reverse; so many indigenous groups tend to assert their original identity. Second, there is no any anthropological or linguistic, or ethnographic survey; so that there is a lack of authentic authority or source that one can fix the number of INs groups. However, the state sponsored population and household census reported that INs population accounts for 35 to 37 percent out of the total national account that is far less than the INs claiming of INs' population 80 percent (Table 4).

Table 4: Janajatis Population and Percentage of National Population in three Successive National Censuses

SN	Janatis	Census, 1991		Census, 2001		Census, 2011	
		No.	%*	No.	%*	No.	%*
1	Magar	1339308	7.24	1,622,421	7.14	1,887,733	7.12

2	Tharu	1194224	6.46	1,533,879	6.75	1,737,470	6.56
3	Newar	1041090	5.63	1,245,232	5.48	1,321,933	4.99
4	Tamang	1018252	5.51	1,282,304	5.64	1,539,830	5.81
5	Rai	525551	2.84	635,151	2.79	620,004	2.34
6	Gurung	449189	2.43	543,571	2.39	522,641	1.97
7	Limbu	297186	1.61	359,379	1.58	387,300	1.46
8	Dhanuk	136944	0.74	188,150	0.83	219,808	0.83
9	Sherpa	110358	0.60	154,622	0.68	112,946	0.43
10	Rajbansi	82177	0.44	95,812	0.42	115,242	0.43
11	Kumal	76635	0.41	99,389	0.44	121,196	0.46
12	Majhi	55050	0.30	72,614	0.32	83,727	0.32
13	Danuwar	50754	0.27	53,229	0.23	84,115	0.32
14	Sunuwar	40943	0.22	95,254	0.42	55,712	0.21
15	ChepangIPraja	36656	0.20	52,237	0.23	68,399	0.26
16	Gangai	22526	0.12	31,318	0.14	36,988	0.14
17	Thami	19103	0.10	22,999	0.10	28,671	0.11
18	Dhimal	16781	0.09	19,537	0.09	26,298	0.10
19	Thakali	13731	0.07	12,973	0.06	13,215	0.05
20	Bhote	12463	0.07	19,261	0.08	13,397	0.05
21	Darai	10759	0.06	14,859	0.07	16,789	0.06
22	Bote	6718	0.04	7,969	0.04	10,397	0.04
23	Jirel	4889	0.03	5,316	0.02	5,774	0.02
24	Lepcha	4826	0.03	3,660	0.02	3,445	0.01
25	Raji	3274	0.02	2,399	0.01	4,235	0.02
26	Raute	2878	0.02	658	0.00	618	0.00
27	Ghartil/Bhujel	NR	NR	117,568	0.52	118,650	0.45
28	SatarISanthal	NR	NR	42,698	0.19	51,735	0.20
29	Jhangadl	NR	NR	41,764	0.18	37,424	0.14
30	Yakkha	NR	NR	17,003	0.07	24,336	0.09
31	Tajpuriya	NR	NR	13,250	0.06	19,213	0.07
32	Pahari	NR	NR	11,505	0.05	13,615	0.05
33	Chhantyal	NR	NR	9,814	0.04	11,810	0.04
34	Baramo	NR	NR	7,383	0.03	8,140	0.03
35	Dura	NR	NR	5,169	0.02	5,394	0.02
36	Meche	NR	NR	3,763	0.02	4,867	0.02
37	Kisan	NR	NR	2,876	0.01	1,739	0.01
38	ByasilSauka	NR	NR	2,103	0.01	3,895	0.01
39	Hayu	NR	NR	1,821	0.01	2,925	0.01
40	Koche	NR	NR	1,429	0.01	1,635	0.01
41	Walung	NR	NR	1,148	0.01	1,249	0.00
42	Munda	NR	NR	660	0.00	2,350	0.01
43	Hyolmo	NR	NR	579	0.00	10,752	0.04
44	Kushwadiya	NR	NR	552	0.00	3,182	0.01
45	Kusunda	NR	NR	164	0.00	273	0.00
46	Kulung	NR	NR	NR	NR	28,613	0.11
47	Ghale	NR	NR	NR	NR	22,881	0.09
48	Khawas	NR	NR	NR	NR	18,513	0.07
49	Nachhiring	NR	NR	NR	NR	7,154	0.03
50	Yamphu	NR	NR	NR	NR	6,933	0.03

51	Chamling	NR	NR	NR	NR	6,668	0.03
52	Aathpariya	NR	NR	NR	NR	5,977	0.02
53	Bantaba	NR	NR	NR	NR	4,604	0.02
54	Dolpo	NR	NR	NR	NR	4,107	0.02
55	Thulung	NR	NR	NR	NR	3,535	0.01
56	MewahangBala	NR	NR	NR	NR	3,100	0.01
57	Bahing	NR	NR	NR	NR	3,096	0.01
58	Lhopa	NR	NR	NR	NR	2,624	0.01
59	Samgpang	NR	NR	NR	NR	1,681	0.01
60	Lhomi	NR	NR	NR	NR	1,614	0.01
61	Khaling	NR	NR	NR	NR	1,571	0.01
62	Topkegola	NR	NR	NR	NR	1,523	0.01
63	Loharung	NR	NR	NR	NR	1,153	0.00
64	Others INs	NR	NR	5,259	0.02	1,228	0.00
	Total INs	6, 572, 265	35.54	8,460,701	37.21	9,487,642	35.81
	Total National	18, 491,097	100.00	22,736,934	100.00	26, 494,504	100.00

Note: 1. NR stands for not reported in the Census.

2. \* Percent given in the column is of the national account

Source: CBS, 1993; CBS, 2003; and CBS, 2013

Apart from these two major *Janjati* and caste group, the prominent group, I did not discuss above are the Muslim population and unidentified and foreign populations (see table 4). Muslim ethnic group is distinct and different from the four-fold Hindu caste system and INs (having a significant population size). The Census 2011 accounts for Muslim population 4.4 percent, followed by Census 2001 (4.3 %) and Census 1991 (3.5 %). Population under the unidentified others accounts for about 0.23 million in 2001, followed by 0.19 million in 1991, became drastic change in 2011 (about 15 thousand only).

Table 5: Population of Muslim, and Unidentified Others' and Foreigner in National Censuses

		Census, 1991		Census, 2001		Census, 2011	
		Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
1	<b>Muslim</b>	<b>654833</b>	<b>3.53</b>	<b>975949</b>	<b>4.29</b>	<b>1164255</b>	<b>4.39</b>
2	Undefined Others	1, 85,957	1.01	2, 31, 641	1.02	15, 277	0.06
3	Foreigner	2,951	0.02	-	0.00	6651	0.03
	Total	843741	4.55	1207590	5.31	1186183	4.47
	Total National	18, 491,097	100.00	22,736,934	100.00	26, 494,504	100.00

Note: 1. NR stands for not reported in the Census.

2. \*Percent given in the column is of national account

Source: CBS, 1993; CBS, 2003; and CBS, 2013

### **Discussions of Hindu Rhetoric: Hindu 94 Percent vs. Ins 80 Percent**

Maddux (2008) argues that the relationship between rhetoric and religion is four-fold: (1) rhetoric is a tool used by religious groups; (2) political rhetoric draws upon religious language; (3) religious systems contribute to the discursive constructions of their adherents' worldviews; and (4) religious traditions contribute to rhetorical theory and practice. Religious systems use *rhetoric as a tool* for interfacing with outside groups and communicating with adherents. Interfacing with outsiders includes efforts to share the message of the faith but also to create relationships with other groups. Nepal was remained a Hindu religious State as the hegemonic government statistics claim that 90 percent of Nepal's population are Hindus until 1991. First democratic constitution ever Nepal had before could not promulgate the multiparty democratic system without referring Hinduism. According to Hutt (1993):

The demands made to the Constitution Recommendation Commission for recognition of languages other than Nepali and religions other than Hinduism, and for the proportional representation of minority groups in the legislature, reflect the growth of communal grievances among minority and regional groups in Nepal, which are based on socioeconomic realities. Rather than attempting to accommodate these grievances, the Commission and the interim constitution perceived them as a threat to national unity, and virtually dismissed them out of hand.

Consequently, the dominant discourse claimed that Nepal should be declared as the only Hindu nation in the World in 1991. This constitution (1991) that declared Nepal as the only Hindu state could not last ever for 5 years; the Maoist insurgency burned out the Hindu religious multiparty democratic constitution. And Nepal fell in the trap of armed insurgency from 1996-2006. Reconciliation of a decade long armed conflict is yet to be done, and republic of Nepal with federal political arrangement is not taking place in full fledge, in such a fragile moment an issue of Hindu nation and Hindu state is raised saying that the secularism was not the agenda of April movement. However, communist party if it is established with the principle of Marxism-Leninism, one of their agenda is secularism (in the sense of anti religious). So, common people have knowledge that when communist party established in 1947, the secular state should be one of their agenda. And as far as the April movement is concerned, without communist forces, particularly the Maoist, it is hard to believe that it was happened. So, secularism was not an agenda of April movement means they are deliberately undermining the whole notion of April movement.

Therefore, population characterized by Hindu religion is ideologically and politically claimed to be more than 94 percent. More importantly, religious system in Nepal is far more complex than the religion itself. This is simply because the notion of religion is enmeshed in the caste/ethnic system in Nepal. Therefore, a question to ask about religion to ordinary respondent is preloaded objectively that urged to respondent that Hindu is a preconceived matter. So, it is important that we understand the Nepali census system and the highlights of castes and ethnicity within it.



Historically, although population enumeration through decennial censuses began in Nepal in 1911, there was virtually no data available on the social composition until 1952/54 (Gurung, 2005). Early census questionnaire did include the question on ethnicity and caste (Statistics Department, 1958) but that dwelt upon the long traditions of hierarchical caste system: Bahuns, Chhetris, Baishyas, and Sudras. The census of 1952/54 is considered more scientific and comprehensive than the previous censuses. As it came in the aftermath of the establishment of democracy in 1951, this census included questions on caste/ethnicity, religion, and language (e.g., mother tongue). However, the census report published only the data on religion and mother tongue, but not on ethnicity/caste because ethnicity was considered as obvious. Ethnicity/caste data became available for the first time in the 1991 census, followed by the 2001 Census, and the latest one is the 2011 census.

The 1991 census provides statistics on 60 ethnic/caste groups. Of these, 26 were Indigenous Nationalities and rest of the groups fall under the four-fold system of Hindu Religion - Bahuns, Chhetris, Baishyas, and Sudras. But new ethnic groups emerged as many previously identified as slaves men and women (*Kariyas*) became independent after the establishment of the first democracy in Nepal in 1950 and the restoration of democracy in 1991<sup>†††</sup>. Following this, the 2001 census reported 101 caste/ethnic groups. Of these, 46 were Indigenous Nationalities; and the 2011 census reported 127 groups, including foreigners, as caste/ethnic groups while 64 groups are ethnic or indigenous nationalities. In this way, the number of Indigenous Peoples as a group has been increasing for the last two decades, which has implicitly, and explicitly challenging the Hindu ideology and politics of claiming Nepal as the only Hindu state.

## Conclusions and Future Direction

It is important to consider that as no anthropological/linguistic survey has been carried out in Nepal to date to note the various ethnic/caste groups, their distribution and population size, the exact number of ethnic/caste groups and their population size is somewhat imprecise in Nepal even today (also see Dahal, 2003). In this kind of uncertain situation, the CBS has remained the single most important reliable source in providing the national-level information on caste/ethnicity and their various socioeconomic characteristics. Although anthropometrical survey has yet to be carried out, general observation made by social/cultural anthropologists have identified four racial groups (Mongoloid, Caucasoid, Dravidian, and Proto-Australoid) in Nepal by looking at the physical features of the Nepali peoples. Despite the fact that there is not any anthropological/linguistic survey, there is a claim that Indigenous Populations largely of Mongolian offshoots account for more than 70 percent. The Mongol National Organization (MNO) is one of the few political parties in the movement in Nepal, and it seeks to unite these ethnic groups whom they call Mongols. According to Hagen (2005) Mongols even make up 80% of the population and Aryans (Hindus) make up 20% of Nepal's population. These diverse data suggest that there is an utmost need of unbiased, independent survey and census in Nepal. Finally, the Nepali Hindu rhetoric persistently exists; the dominant groups tend to keep its dominance weaving the intentions with the numbers, words, and voices. On the other hand, the dominated

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<sup>†††</sup> Democracy was couped in Nepal in 2017 by then King Mahendra.

communities also should not be silent anymore, like they used to be in the past; they should raise the issues. They not only should request the international independent institutions' assistance to properly enumerate their numbers properly to meet what they perceived numerical majority of the national population, but also to network with local and global indigenous and minority communities to make their identities locally and globally visible.

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