

THE GROWTH OF THE *ĀDIVĀSĪ JANAJĀTI* MOVEMENT IN NEPAL AFTER 1990: THE NON-POLITICAL INSTITUTIONAL AGENTS

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One of the most influential social movements that Nepal has seen in the post-1990 era is the *ādivāsī janajāti* (indigenous nationalities) movement.¹ In the main, this movement is concerned with creating a Nepal in which discrimination against ‘ethnic’ Nepalis who make up about 37 percent of the population does not exist. The movement was first launched by individual activists during the late years of the king-led Panchayat System (1960-1990). Following the *Jana Āndolan* of 1990 and the fundamental guarantees provided by the Constitution of Nepal, 1990, some of these activists started to organize themselves in various *janajāti* institutions including what was then called the Nepal Janajati Mahasangh (Nepal Federation of Nationalities). These organizations were of various sizes and they pursued different objectives to advance the *janajāti* movement. This movement was also strengthened by the participation of academics and media personnel. Political workers affiliated to the *janajāti* wings of various political parties also played a role in the movement. As the demands of the *janajātis* gained strength during the 1990s, the Nepal government responded with various initiatives in an effort to address those demands. It created institutional entities within the government bureaucracy to implement some of its responses and programs.²

Hence it can be said many individuals and institutions have contributed to making the *janajāti* movement a relatively successful social movement in post-1990 Nepal. In this article, I focus on the non-political institutional agents within the *janajāti* movement. By ‘non-

1 Hereafter I will just use the term *janajāti* to refer to the movement. Research for this paper was completed in February 2005 and the text was finalized by March 2005. Except for small changes and corrections in the main text and the references, no effort has been made to cover the relevant developments in the *janajāti* movement that have taken place since February 2005.

2 The most extensive discussion of these initiatives taken by the Nepal government can be found in Subba et al. (2002). See also Subba (2003a) and S. Gurung (2004).

political' I refer to those entities that are not explicitly affiliated to political parties or the government. However it would be redundant to say that the work of the non-political entities that I do examine – *janajāti* organizations, academia and media – is highly political in its nature and effect. This analysis seems relevant primarily because although there is a growing literature on the *janajāti* movement, there is not much written on the agents who have provided visibility and success to this movement.³ My examination of these non-political institutional agents also emerges from my larger interest in the lives and social trajectories of intermediate institutions that have come to occupy an important place between the individual/family and the state in recent history of Nepal (cf. Onta 1999a, 1999b, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005; Onta and Parajulee 2001; Onta et al. 2005). The social dynamics of this intermediate level of Nepali society in post-Panchayat Nepal has not received much scholarly attention⁴ and this article tries to fill that gap partially by focusing on those dynamics of the *janajāti* movement.

This article begins with a brief discussion of the dominant context against which the *janajāti* movement was launched. It is followed by a brief analysis of the definitional politics of the terms *ādivāsī janajāti*. This analysis is relevant here because it allows us to delimit the social turf of the *janajāti* movement in Nepal. It also sensitizes us to the differences amongst various *janajāti* groups that are important to our understanding of the internal politics within the *janajāti* movement. In the subsequent main part of this article, I discuss the various non-political institutional agents who have contributed to the growth of the *janajāti* movement and argue that its relative success can be attributed to the work of the *janajāti* organizations, academia and media. My treatment of this subject is presented in a non-celebratory mode and I highlight both the strengths and weaknesses of the various institutional agents. This mode of analysis, it seems to me, is a good beginning for a case study of an important set of intermediate institutional agents. I leave it to others to make connections between my analysis here and the relevant ongoing discussions in the literature on agency in social movements.

3 Exceptions are Mukta S. Tamang (2004a, 2004b) from which I have borrowed liberally in this analysis. Others include Gellner (2003a) and Gellner and Karki (2004). Also see Pfaff-Czarnecka (1999).

4 Again there are exceptions which include Fujikura (2001, forthcoming), Krauskopff (2003).

The Dominant Context

What we know as Nepal today is the result of territorial consolidation activities that started from the relatively impoverished tiny kingdom of Gorkha in the early 1740s. Under the leadership of King Prithvīnarayan Shah (r. 1742-1775), the leaders of Gorkha set out to conquer and rule a long stretch of land in the central Himalayas. Despite the phenomenal growth of the Kingdom, its leadership until the mid-19th century continued to come from a small set of families from the heartland of Gorkha (Regmi 1995). This class was completely dependent upon the king for its economic security and hence could not become the basis for the growth of oppositional (and democracy-oriented) power centres in Nepali society. Under the absolute control of the King, Nepal functioned as a socially hierarchical Hindu polity with no legal or constitutional recognition of ideas related to the concept of equality until the mid-19th century when Hindu ritual-based hierarchy and inequality was legally recognized as the basis of the state.

The political ideology of pre-1990 Nepali polity revolved around some specific themes. From the point of view of this article, among those themes, the more important ones are state-backed Hinduism and the Nepali language (Onta 1996a, 1999a). State-backed Hinduism involved the codification and practice of caste-based differentiation through the provision of the Muluki Ain. The original Muluki Ain of 1854 propagated by the Rana premier Jang Bahadur contained a five-tier national caste hierarchy (Höfer 1979) in which the people of Nepal were divided into the following categories according to ascribed ritual purity: wearers of holy cord (*tāgādhārī*), non-enslavable alcohol-drinkers (*namāsine matwālī*), enslavable alcohol-drinkers (*māsine matwālī*), impure but touchable castes (*choi chiṭo hālnya nāparne*) and impure and untouchable castes (*choi chiṭo hālnya parne*) (see also Gurung 2003a). The high caste hill Hindus (Bahun, thakuri and chetri) were placed at the top. Below them were the traditionally non-Hindu groups broadly corresponding to today's *janajātis* under the rubric of *matwālī* (alcohol-drinker). The non-enslavable *matwālī* contained those that were relatively close to the rulers such as Gurung, Magar, Newar, etc. and enslavable *matwālī* contained relatively peripheral groups such as Bhote, Chepang, Gharti, Tharu, etc. (Gurung 2003b). Hindu castes that were said to be impure but touchable along with Muslims and Christians were ranked one above the bottom and Hindu castes deemed as impure and untouchable were placed at the bottom. This differentiation provided the basis for a forceful state-promoted hinduization of the polity in general in which the state

guaranteed inequality based on one's caste in various sectors of society (e.g. punishment for crimes committed, etc.). With the state offices captured by high caste Hindus of hill origin, the ascribed national caste hierarchy became the basis for discrimination against individuals and groups who were not Hindus or 'touchables', namely *matwālis* and 'untouchables' (today's *dalits*).

The promotion of the Nepali language (a Indo-Aryan language), which happened to be the mother tongue of the high caste Hindus of hill origin, as the official language of the state was done at the expense of more than 100 other languages spoken in the country. In the post-1951 period, the education system and the state-owned mass media with Nepali as the medium language contributed to the death of several languages formerly in use in Nepal. It also contributed to language shift amongst speakers of other languages who increasingly began to function in Nepali. A polity in which the Nepali language was a tool of dominance resulted in various degrees of discrimination against those who were speakers of other languages. Janajātis who spoke, in the main, various Tibeto-Burman languages, then became victims of language-based discrimination.

Religion and language, it could then be argued, together formed a strong basis for discrimination against Nepalīs who were not Hindus (or Hindus of the 'low' castes) and who spoke languages other than Nepali as their first (or second) language. As the pre-1990 polity promoted this kind of discrimination, religion and language became a source of social inequality not only in what could be called the 'cultural' domain but also the 'material' domain of the polity. Given that the polity's consolidation by the Hindu monarch (with assistance from upper caste Hindus) had been achieved along with the mobilization of state Hinduism and the Nepali language as resources, janajātis and others who were disadvantaged owners of these resources, also became victims of a biased state-distributed reward system that was stacked in favor of Nepali speaking high caste Hindus from the hills. This was most evident in the way in which the state distributed land under its control to its loyal civil and military servants from the caste groups and placed a wide array of tax burdens on the peasants including those from the *janajāti* groups (Regmi 1971, 1978, and 1995; Holmberg, March with Tamang 1999). Hence large segments of the Nepali population became victims of state-reproduced social inequality.

The inequality faced by the janajātis as a whole has been discussed at length by several analysts using various types of statistics and need not be repeated here. The most detailed discussions include those provided by

Neupane (2000), Subba et al. (2002), H. Gurung (2003b), Acharya et al. (2004), M. Tamang (2004g) and for the case of mainstream print media institutions, Parajulee and Gautam (2001). Neupane (2000: 61-93) has looked at the caste/ethnic composition of various state and civil society institutions as they existed in the late 1990s and has presented them in a wide array of tables to prove how disproportionate janajāti presence is in leadership positions in those sectors.⁵ To summarize the conclusions of the above analysts, it must be said that the janajātis as a group face multiple exclusions and disparities in Nepali society even though it is the case that the level of inequalities suffered by each *janajāti* group varies. Excluded in the main from the political spheres of governance, most of the *janajātis* also suffer from economic and educational deprivation in comparison with the high caste groups (H. Gurung 2006). These deprivations are thought to be derivative of the fact of their political marginalization.

The janajāti movement, in the main, is a response to this complex set of discriminations and inequalities. This movement has tried to rectify the discriminations suffered by *janajātis* in all domains of social life. Movement actors have demanded constitutional reforms, the declaration of Nepal as a secular state, equality in linguistic rights, equitable representation in state and other institutions, access to common properties and resources, the right to self-determination and ethnic autonomy.⁶ On these demands, there are differences between the positions advocated by various participants within the *janajāti* community, both in terms of the structural composition of the demand package and the means and procedures that need to be followed to achieve them. Also these demands are not bereft of confusion.⁷ Nevertheless it is quite clear that there is a genuine deliberative effort going on to achieve conceptual clarity about the demands of the *janajātis*. This is obvious from the participation of

5 It is important to note that those included in the *janajāti* category by Neupane (2000) do not correspond exactly with the 59 *janajāti* groups listed in the National Foundation for Development of Indigenous Nationalities (NFDIN) Act 2002. The NFDIN schedule with 59 *janajātis* is discussed below.

6 Details of these demands have been discussed by many including M. Tamang (2004g), H. Gurung (2004b), Om Gurung (2004), and Subba (2003b).

7 For instance, there remains much that still needs to be thought through regarding the financial viability of the proposed ethnically autonomous federal structure (Hachhethu 2004) and the feasibility of securing such a structure from within the portals of a unitary state (Khanal 2004).

many academics, activists and politicians (both *janajātis* and non-*janajātis* alike) in the debates about how to ‘restructure’ the Nepali polity.

Ādivāsī Janajāti: Definitional Politics of the Past and the Future

This section looks at the various definitional issues related to what is now being described as the *ādivāsī janajāti* movement. In English, it is rendered as the movement of the indigenous nationalities of Nepal. In this section I highlight that there are various definitions of the terms *ādivāsī* and *janajāti* alive within the *janajāti* movement. In addition I also argue that despite the existing definitional diversities, state-led mechanisms have produced a working definition of who is and is not an *ādivāsī janajāti* in Nepal today. I also highlight the variations amongst the *janajāti* groups in terms of their size and other parameters.

During the Panchayat era (1960-90), when and if the fact that a majority of Nepali ethnic groups was excluded from the state machinery was discussed in non-pejorative terms, it was more often the case that they were referred to as *pichaḍiekā jāti* (backward ethnic groups, e.g. Rana 1986[1973]) or *pichaḍāiekā jāti* (ethnic groups who had been rendered backward, e.g. Ghala Rai 1985). That is not to say that the use of the terms *ādivāsī* and *janajāti* in reference to the disadvantaged ethnic groups was unknown during the Panchayat period. In the relatively freer atmosphere for discussions around and after the Referendum of 1980 some Nepalis did use the term *ādivāsī janajāti* in almost the same sense they have acquired today (e.g., J. Magar 1986).⁸

Immediately after the end of the Panchayat system in April 1990, eight ethnic organizations came together to form what was then called the Nepal Janajati Mahasangh (Nepal Federation of Nationalities, or NEFEN for short).⁹ Regarding the choice of the term *janajāti* in the name of this federation, Mukta S. Tamang has written:

8 After a series of student-led protests against the Panchayat System in 1979, King Birendra announced a referendum which was held in 1980. Asked to choose between a reformed Panchayat System and a multiparty democratic system, the Nepali people opted for the former by a margin of about 400,000 votes (namely, 2.4 million vs 2 million votes). However, it was suspected that the Referendum was fixed in favour of the Panchayat System. For further details on this exercise in Nepali history, see Baral (1983). For analysis of the Panchayat years that are relevant here, see Burghart (1994) and Onta (1996b, 1999a).

9 Its current name is Nepal Adivasi Janajati Mahasangh or Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN). See below.

After much debate and discussion the name “Janajati” and its English translation “Nationalities” was finalized. According to Parshuram Tamang, one of the founding members of the Federation...the term “Janajati” was chosen to include all the historically marginalized groups engaged in democratic struggle. The term was also thought to be useful to denote the existence of distinct culture and history of the ethnic groups separate from “Jat” or Hindu caste system (2004b: 2).

The term *ādivāsī* (indigenous people) was included in the definition of *janajāti* in the original constitution of NEFEN (dated 2047 v.s. or 1990) in a manner that suggested that the use of the latter encompassed the former.

The early 1990s was marked by a debate about what term(s) to use to refer to ethnic groups in Nepal.¹⁰ This debate took place between those who were variously important players in the movement and some outside observers and academics. One strand of this debate was focused on the use of the term *janajāti*. Those who favored the use of this term, used it to refer to all ethnic groups in Nepal who did not belong to the Hindu caste system, and who had ties to specific locations in Nepal, spoke a distinct language and had a culture of their own. However ethnic leaders like Gopal Gurung (1992) of the Mongol National Organization rejected the term *janajāti* by arguing that the concepts embedded in the terms *jat* and *jati* only existed within Hinduism and just like *Bahun*s and *Chhetri*s, those referred to as *janajātis* were migrants from India and were hence not indigenous to Nepal. Instead he preferred to use the term *mūlbāsī* (main inhabitants) and claimed that 80 percent of Nepal’s population consisted of *mūlbāsī* Mongols.

The second strand of this debate was focused on the use of the term *ādivāsī* whose literal translation would be original inhabitants or indigenous people. Arguing that the Nepali population consisted of descendants of different waves of migrants from various directions, anthropologist Rajendra Pradhan stated that “indigenous people do not exist in Nepal; or if they do, the majority of the Nepalis are indigenous, including many of the *Bahun*s and *Chhetri*s” (1994: 45). This line of argument did not please those who favored the use of the term *ādivāsī* in

10 This debate was a subset of the very lively and larger debate about the location of ethnicity in post-1990 democratic Nepal that characterized the public arena in the early 1990s. Some of that debate is reviewed in Bhattachan (1995). That article also contains references to some of the most important contributions to that debate (Bhattachan 1995: 144-46).

reference to Nepal's non-Hindu ethnic population whose subjugation by the *Bahun*s and *Chhetri*s (who they claimed had come to Nepal later) was central to their argument of how the upper caste Hindus had become dominant in Nepal. This was a clash between those who wanted to popularize the use of the term *ādivāsī* as the Nepali equivalent of indigenous peoples and hence link the movement within Nepal with an already existing international movement and discourse organized around the idea of indigenous peoples, as recognized in the UN system and outside of it (Bhattachan 1996; see also Mabuhang 2003a) and those who read the term literally in a temporal mode (Pradhan 1994).

Those in favor of the term also wanted to capitalize partly on the then emerging practice of regarding self-identification as a basic criterion for determining the indigeness of groups. This criterion would also allow the users to highlight *ādivāsīs* as those who were variously disempowered in the Nepali society at large and hence could claim various relational histories of discrimination. This was in keeping with definitions proposed by bodies such as The World Council of Indigenous Peoples (WCIP). According to WCIP, "the term indigenous peoples refers to people living in countries which have a population composed of differing ethnic or racial groups who are descendants of the earliest populations living in the area and who do not, as a group, control the national government of the countries within which they live (quoted in Bhattachan 1996: 4)."¹¹

The UN declaration of 1993 as the World Indigenous Peoples Year and the decade 1995-2004 as the International Decade of the World Indigenous Peoples provided further impetus for the use of the term *ādivāsī*/indigenous peoples in Nepal. At a national consultation workshop organized by the National Ad Hoc Committee/Nepal for the International Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples in March 1994, there was a further elaboration of the term. The workshop adopted the following definition for the indigenous peoples of Nepal. The "Indigenous Peoples" refer to those communities

11 Internationally there is also the reluctance to accept the use of the term 'peoples' in combination with indigenous. This reluctance is related to the fact that various states do not want to subscribe to the idea that their 'indigenous peoples' have the right to self-determination. In Nepal this 'peoples' term does not seem to have been that important an item in the movement possibly because of linguistic difficulties. When translated into Nepali which already had a surfeit of terms in usage, the links to self-determination were no longer so direct, I suppose.

- i) which possess their own distinct and original lingual and cultural traditions and whose religious faith is based on ancient animism (worshippers of ancestors, land, season, nature), or who do not claim “The Hinduism” enforced by the state, as their traditional and original religion.
- ii) those existing descendants of the peoples whose ancestors had established themselves as the first settlers or principal inhabitants in any part of the land falling within the territory of modern state (Nepal), or and who inhabit the present territory of Nepal as the time when persons of different culture or ethnic origin arrived there and who have their own history (written or oral) and historical continuity.
- iii) which communities have been displaced from their own land for the last four centuries, particularly during the expansion and establishment of modern Hindu nation state and have been deprived of their traditional rights to own the natural resources (Kipat {communal land}, cultivable land, water, minerals, trading points, etc.).
- iv) who have been subjugated in the state’s political power set-up (decision-making process), whose ancient culture, language and religion are non-dominant and social values neglected and humiliated.
- v) whose society is traditionally erected on the principle of egalitarianism – rather than the hierarchy of the Indo-Aryan caste system and gender equality (or rather women enjoying more advantageous positions) – rather than social, economic and religious subordination of woman, but whose social norms and values have been slighted by the state.
- vi) which formally or informally admit or claim to be “the indigenous peoples of Nepal” on the basis of aforementioned characteristics (P. Tamang et al. 1994: 26).

Defined in the above manner, the term indigenous could be used as a synonym for *janajātis* in Nepal. Both referred to ethnic groups with ties to specific locations, languages and cultures and a common history of subjugation in modern Nepal (H. Gurung 2004b).

On 14 January 1996, the Nepal government constituted a task force under the convenership of sociologist Sant Bahadur Gurung to suggest the modalities for the formation of a foundation that would work for the upliftment of the *janajātis*. In its report, the task force proposed that a National Foundation for Upliftment of the Nationalities be established. Although the term indigenous did not appear in the title of the proposed foundation (it was later added by the parliament when the related bill came up for discussion), it was included in the definition of *janajātis*. *Janajātis* were defined primarily as those communities who had their own

distinct language and traditional rites and customs but were not part of the four-tier Hindu varna system. The task force delineated some other characteristics of *jana-jātis* as communities:

- who have a separate collective cultural identity;
- who have their own traditional language, religion, customs and culture;
- whose traditional social structure is based on equality;
- who are traditionally located in particular geographic regions;
- who have their own written or oral history;
- who have a ‘we-feeling’ within their communities
- who do not have influential role in the modern politics and state governance of Nepal
- who are indigenous people of Nepal and
- who call themselves *jana-jāti* (S. Gurung et al. 1996: 13; my translation).

Based on these criteria, the task force produced a schedule listing 61 *jana-jātis* in Nepal (S. Gurung et al. 1996: 14-16). After the National Committee for Development of Nationalities (NCDN) was formed by His Majesty’s Government of Nepal (HMG/N) in July 1997 as an interim body primarily responsible for facilitating the establishment of the above mentioned foundation, the schedule proposed by the task force was adopted by HMG/N though its publication in the Nepal Gazette.

After much delay, the bill related to the *ādivāsī jana-jāti* foundation was passed by the House of Representatives in July 2001 and after receiving the royal seal, became an Act on 7 February 2002. This National Foundation for Development of Indigenous Nationalities (NFDIN) Act, 2002 has defined indigenous nationalities as “a tribe or community as mentioned in the schedule having its own mother tongue and traditional rites and customs, distinct cultural identity, distinct social structure and written or unwritten history” (NFDIN 2003: 32). The part of the definition proposed by the task force which stated that *jana-jātis* were not part of the four-tier Hindu varna system has been omitted in the NFDIN Act. It is important to note that the NFDIN Act of 2002 modified the schedule proposed by the task force with 61 *jana-jātis*. Taking into consideration some of the criticisms made against the earlier classification (while not addressing some others) the schedule published as part of the Act only lists 59 groups as indigenous nationalities (see Table 1). This

Table 1: Classification of 59 *ādivāsī janajātis* listed in the NFDIN Act, 2002 based on socio-economic status

Region	Classification of Indigenous Nationalities				
	Endangered	Highly Marginalized	Marginalized	Disadvantaged	Advantaged
Mountain (18)		Shiyar Shingsawa (Lhomi) Thudam	Bhote Dolpo Larke Lhopa Mugal Topkegola Walung	Bara Gaule Byansi (Sauka) Chhairotan Markhali Thakali Sherpa Tangbe Tingaule Thakali	Thakali
Hill (24)	Bankariya Hayu Kusbadiya Kusunda Lapcha Surel	Baramu Chepang Thami	Bhujel Dura Pahari Phree Sunuwar Tamang	Chhantyal Gurung Jirel Limbu Magar Rai Yakkha Yolmo	Newar
Inner Tarai (7)	Raji Raute	Bote Danuwar Majhi	Darai Kumal		
Tarai (10)	Kisan Meche (Bodo)	Dhanuk (Rajbansi) Jhagad Santhal (Satar)	Dhimal Gangai Rajbanshi (Koch) Tajpuriya Tharu		
Total (59)	10	12	20	15	2

Source: NEFIN (2004b) as represented in M. Tamang (2004b)

state-led exercise has now realized a working definition of who is and is not a *janajāti* in Nepal. On the recommendation of the Governing Council of NFDIN, the Nepal government can make changes in the schedule of *janajātis* by publishing a notice in the Nepal Gazette (NFDIN 2003:

52-3), although this has not happened in the four years since the passing of the NFDIN Act in 2002.

There are several points to be noted about this definitional exercise and its implications. First, in the NFDIN schedule, out of the 59 indigenous nationalities, 18 are from the mountainous region, 24 from the hills, 7 from the inner Tarai and 10 from the Tarai (Table 1). Second, the definition in the NFDIN Act and the schedule of indigenous nationalities attached to it give rise to a lot of confusion. Some of this confusion arises because arguably some of those listed in the schedule are spatially distributed member of the same ethnic group. This is most prominently obvious for the case of the Thakalis who are listed several times in the schedule based on their separate locations inside Thakkhola. Having accepted a multiplicity of Thakali listings, it will now be difficult to not accept similar requests that have already been made by groups erstwhile encompassed in the category of 'Rai' (Kulung 2004, Himalayan News Service 2005.).

An additional source of confusion comes from the contested nature of the inclusion of Newars. This has been the case ever since the *janajāti* movement took off in 1990 (also see Gellner 2003a). Newars – who are overwhelmingly located in urban areas (Quigley 1995) – have a full-fledged caste system with not only 'high caste' groups but also 'low caste' groups that would fit the current categories recognized in the term 'dalit' (Vishwakarma 2003). Hence they disqualify on the main definitional grounds proposed by the Sant B Gurung-led task force. An additional ground for disqualification is that Newars have been close to the power centre of modern Nepal by virtue of the fact that they were the original inhabitants of the Kathmandu Valley. Once King Prithvinarayan Shah moved the capital of his Gorkhali kingdom to Kathmandu in 1770, some Newar families have always held key positions in the ruling establishment (Malla 1992). Others have built their business empires in close collaboration with the ruling elites both in Kathmandu and in other parts of urban Nepal. While their language and some aspects of their cultural life were banished from the emerging public sphere promoted and authorized by the state around the Nepali language, Newars have benefited disproportionately from the development investments made in Nepal since the mid-20th century. Newars (at about 5.6 % of the population) are over-represented in the civil service, academia, politics and other important spheres of Nepali society. Hence they can not claim a history of oppression from the modern Nepali state (Onta 1999b) that

would correspond with, say the case of the Tamangs (e.g. Holmberg, March with Tamang 1999) or Tharus (e.g. Guneratne 2002).

Despite these contradictions, their inclusion in the schedule has been justified on several grounds (e.g. Shrestha 1999, Malla 2000, H.Gurung 2004b). These include the claim that the caste system prevalent in Newar society is not based on the logic of ritual hierarchy but on profession-oriented specializations. Anyone who has experience of Kathmandu's Newar society would have to agree that while this claim is partially true, the caste system within the Newars *also* has a strong ritual purity basis.¹² This has been the conclusion of every single serious scholar of Newar culture and society. To quote one such scholar, "The awkward fact is, the traditional Newar caste system is a classic, urban, highly 'evolved' South Asian system, no more different from Indian regional systems than any other. Indeed one could argue that the Newar caste system and their religious culture are more Sanskritic than that of the Bahuns."¹³ Instead of overextending an unconvincing argument, those who want to include Newars in the *janajāti* category could have simply used the language shift data for Newars for that purpose. According to the census of 2001, about 33.7 percent of Newars no longer speak the language as their mother tongue (Gurung 2003c: 16). This data could be used as the basis of the inclusion of Newars in the *janajāti* category as a linguistically suppressed group, one in which a significant portion of its members now speak, in all likelihood, the language of the ruling Bahun and Chhetris, namely, Nepali, as their first language.

The third point is to note that among the 59 *janajātis* listed in the NFDIN Act, only 43 have been enumerated in the national census of 2001. Had the Act been passed before the 2001 census, this number would have been most certainly larger.¹⁴ Based on that enumeration, it has

12 The somewhat ambiguous nature of inclusion or exclusion of Newars in the *janajāti* category has been debated within the movement prior to the 2002 NFDIN Act. For instance, NEFEN organized a special discussion program dedicated to this topic in early March 1999. For a report of the deliberations that took place during that program see Janajati (1999: 114-120). On that occasion various commentators spoke for and against the inclusion of Newars in the *janajāti* category (also see Gellner 2003a).

13 David N. Gellner, personal communication, 23 January 2005. See also Gellner (1991) and Quigley (1995).

14 Although it can not be proved, some *janajāti* leaders think that it is plausible that the delay in the passing of the Act beyond the 2001 census was deliberate. Om Gurung, personal communication, 3 December 2004.

been calculated that the total population of indigenous nationalities is 8.27 million. Given that the total population of Nepal according to the 2001 census was 22.74 million, *jana-jātis* account for 36.4 percent of the total population. One interpretation – favored by NFDIN – is that the ‘missing’ 16 indigenous nationalities “have been conveniently relegated to the category of ‘others’ which are registered at 4.8% of the population” (NFDIN 2003: 3; also S. Gurung 2004). Accordingly NFDIN feels safe to claim that *jana-jātis* are 42% of the total population (NFDIN 2003: 3). However one need not fully agree with this reading since some of the groups listed in the schedule of the NFDIN Act 2002 are there on an erroneous basis and hence the list needs to be revised. In any case, it can be agreed that *ādivāsī jana-jātis* constitute about 37 per cent of Nepal’s total population.

The fourth point to note is that the various *jana-jāti* groups that have been enumerated are of different sizes. According to the census of 2001, among the 59 *jana-jātis*, only four have a population that exceeds a million. They include the Magar (1.62 million), Tharu (1.53 million), Tamang (1.28 million) and Newar (1.25 million). Other groups which have a population that is between 100,000 and a million include the Rai (0.64 million), Gurung (0.54 million), Limbu (0.36 million), Sherpa (0.15 million) and Bhujel/Gharti (0.12 million). Apart from these nine groups, the rest of the *jana-jātis* have a population that is below the 100,000 mark (H. Gurung 2003c: 37-8). Some *jana-jātis* such as Hyolmo, Kusunda, Raute, Kushwadia, and Munda have a total population that is smaller than 1,000 and several *jana-jātis* have a population that does not exceed 10,000. In other words, the total population of most individual *jana-jāti* groups is rather small and their locational density is spatially varied (see H. Gurung 2003b, 2003c for details).

The fifth point to note is that in terms of their socio-economic development, the identified 59 groups are variously located and hence the schedule as published in the NFDIN Act 2002 does not have significant referential utility with respect to the execution of development programs or affirmative action programs. Having realized this, and upon the demand of NFDIN, a task force from the Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN 2004b) has classified the 59 groups into five categories (Table 1) using various human development parameters.¹⁵

15 I have been unable to locate the document that details this categorization process. When I asked for the document that justified the methodology used in this classification, I was told that NEFIN had submitted no such document to

Approved less-than-unanimously by the Federal Council of NEFIN on 1 March 2004, these categories are: endangered groups (10 *janajātis*), highly marginalized groups (12), marginalized groups (20), disadvantaged groups (15) and advanced groups (2). Through this classification, the *janajāti* movement has officially acknowledged that the various *janajāti* groups have achieved different standards of development and hence, by implication, do not seek and expect the same level of affirmative action/reservations across all the groups. This takes care of one of the standard criticisms made of the *janajātis* by non-*janajātis* who say that affirmative action type programs are not needed for the better-off *janajātis*. However it must also be recognized that this classification exercise has its internal critics.¹⁶

The final point to note is that no “definition of ethnic group acceptable to all has been given till now.” Hence it has been said that “the search for a scientific definition that reflects the myriad aspects of the ethnic groups of Nepal continues” (H. Gurung et al. 2004: 17). I think this search will be unsuccessful as the operational dynamics of searching for a definition is political in nature and not scientific. If this could be recognized, then definitional debates and listing in schedules could be viewed more as a political act than a scientific enterprise. This political act has both a historical dimension (the politics of marginalization by the dominant high castes that resulted in various disparities that the *janajātis* face today) and a future-oriented dimension that seeks the execution of certain policies and programs led by the state that will benefit the *janajātis*.

The Non-Political Actors in the *Janajāti* Movement

Although some ethnic organizations had come into existence before the end of the Panchayat System in 1990, they concerned themselves, in the main, with social, economic, and cultural matters of their own groups (Guneratne 2002, Fisher 2001, Sitaram Tamang 1994). Seeking of fundamental political rights through an abolition of the partyless Panchayat system became the primary agenda of some ethnic activists

NFDIN apart from the classified list. Ram Maden, NFDIN, personal communication, 3 December 2004.

16 Malla K. Sundar who heads the Newar member organization in NEFIN, Newa De Dabu, wrote a ‘note of dissent’ against the 5-tier classification process, claiming that the methodology used was “baseless and unscientific.” He adds that this exercise has the potential of “disabling and fragmenting” the *janajāti* movement in Nepal. Personal communication, 8 December 2004.

during the 1980s. However, given the policing sensibilities of the Panchayat state, these activists embedded themselves within larger anti-Panchayat political formations (mostly the then banned political parties). Full-fledged organizational work on 'ethnic' themes was not possible until after the political change of 1990.

The first recognition of Nepal's multi-ethnic and multi-lingual characteristics was recorded in the 1990 Constitution of Nepal even as it declared the kingdom to be Hindu (Article 4). While recognizing the Nepali language written in the Devnagari script as the language of the nation and the language of official business of the state, Article 6(2) of the Constitution stated that "all languages spoken as mother tongue in various parts of Nepal are Nepal's national languages." As part of the fundamental rights of Nepali citizens, Article 18 recognized the cultural and educational right in the following manner: "(1) Every community residing within the Kingdom of Nepal shall have the right to preserve and promote its own language, script and culture. (2) Each community shall have the right to establish schools for providing primary level education to the children in their mother tongue." Similarly Article 19 recognized the citizen's freedom to profess and practice her religion although it proscribed religious conversion. In the Directive Principles of the State, the 1990 Constitution made some other points that are relevant to this analysis. In Article 25(3), it talked about the elimination of economic and social inequalities as a social objective of the State. Promotion of language, literature, script, art and culture of all is mentioned in Article 26(2) whereas in Article 26(10) it is stated: "The State shall adopt a policy of raising the standard of socially and economically backward *jana-jātis* and communities by making special provisions with regard to their education, health, and employment." Hence the basis for state initiated affirmative action for *jana-jātis* was recognized in the Constitution.

Compared to the 1962 Panchayat Constitution, the Constitution of 1990 was progressive in its recognition of the multi-ethnic and multi-lingual nature of Nepali society. By using the term *jana-jāti* explicitly in Article 26(10), the Constitution acknowledged their presence and their relative deprivation in social and economic terms. It also required the State to commit itself to policies and programs that specifically assist the *jana-jātis* to overcome their social and economic disadvantages and promote their languages, literatures and cultures. However, the Constitution did not define the term *jana-jāti* and this definitional lack has

delayed the deployment of significant policies and programs by at least a dozen years.

With respect to fundamental rights, the Constitution guaranteed against discrimination based on religion, caste, sex, and ideology but not language (Article 11). Article 12 of the Constitution also guaranteed the freedom of thought and expression, the freedom to assemble peacefully and without arms, the freedom to form unions and associations, the freedom to move and reside in any part of Nepal and the freedom to carry out any profession, occupation, trade or industry. However certain conditions have been added in the same article where it was stated that “nothing... shall be deemed to prevent the making of laws to impose reasonable restriction on any act which...disturbs the harmonious relation subsisting among the peoples of various castes, tribes or communities” (Article 12.2.3). The additional clause gave room for the passing of legal measures directed against those who challenge the status quo on behalf of the *janajātis* as they can be deemed to be ‘disturbing’ the social relationship between the dominant groups and others. It has also been pointed out (e.g. Bhattachan 1999a: 48) that the fundamental right to association guaranteed to the citizens of Nepal under Article 12.2.C. has been curtailed by Article 113.3 where it is stated “the Election Commission shall not register any political organization or party if any Nepali citizen is discriminated against in becoming its member on the basis of religion, caste, tribe, language or sex or if the name, objectives, insignia or flag of the political organization or party is of such a nature that it is religious, communal or tends to fragment the country.”

It must also be noted that the 1990 Constitution contained many elements that are discriminatory against *janajātis* and women (Bhattachan 1999a, Lawoti 2005, Bhattachan and Manandhar Gurung 2004). Foremost in this list is the assertion of Nepal being a Hindu kingdom. In contrast to many suggestions received by the Constitution Recommendations Commission, the 1990 Constitution (Article 4.1) declared the kingdom as Hindu (Hutt 1994). *Janajātis* have maintained that Nepal should be declared a secular country (NEFIN 2000). By declaring the Nepali language as the “language of the nation” and Nepal’s “official language” and calling all other mother tongues spoken within Nepal “national languages,” the Constitution gave at most a secondary status to these other languages (Article 6). Based on this discrimination, the Supreme Court of Nepal ruled in 1999 against the use of local languages as a second official language in local offices with elected representatives. Against such practice, it has been argued that the state has the obligation

to treat all languages equally (NEFIN 2000). The possibility of the opportunity for education in the mother tongue at the primary school level (Article 18) is a limited one (NEFIN 2000).¹⁷ Also by anchoring natural citizenship of the newborn to the citizenship of the father concerned, the Constitution had discriminated against all women of Nepal including *janajāti* women (Article 9.1).

Whatever might be its defects, the fundamental rights guaranteed by the 1990 Constitution were necessary for the *janajāti* movement to grow. By exercising their right to association, many *janajātis* started small and big organizations that have done work in cultural, social, religious, educational, service-delivery, and human rights fronts. By exercising their right to freedom of thought and expression, *janajātis* have publicly articulated their grievances against the Nepali state and demanded policies and action to redress the discrimination they have faced. Since the issues raised by the movement have been serious ones with respect to the future of Nepali polity, the movement has also been able to draw the attention and participation of both *janajāti* and non-*janajāti* actors and institutions, academia, media, political parties, and donors. Here I analyze *janajāti* organizations especially NEFIN and also the contributions made by academia and media.

Janajāti Organizations

There has been no comprehensive survey or study of the post-1990 growth of *janajāti* organizations in Nepal. Hence many aspects of the organizational lives of these entities have never been discussed in the literature related to the *janajāti* movement. The state of public knowledge about them is so meager that we do not know for sure just how many of these organizations are around. A survey of published sources, documents in NEFIN and NFDIN, and interviews has suggested that there are at least 150 such organizations but the author is cautious to add that the list he has prepared “is not exhaustive and should be taken as preliminary” (Mukta S. Tamang 2004a: 1 and appendix 1). Subba et al. (2002: 175) claim that there are about 300 NGOs established by *janajātis* to work for their development but they do not say how they came up with this number. I am tempted to guess that the actual total runs into several hundreds more. This guess is based on the assumption that many of the larger *janajāti*

17 NEFIN (2000) also provides further details and recommendations regarding how the Constitution can be revised to eliminate the sources of discrimination against *janajātis*.

groups (e.g., Magar, Tamang, Newar, Gurung, etc.) now have major organizations which have many district or city level units which are, for all functional purposes, quite autonomous. Hence they should be counted as separate entities. Most of these organizations seem to be located in the eastern, central, and western development regions of Nepal. Some of the larger *janajāti* groups have several organizations while some of the smaller ones have not yet formed organizations of their own. Those *janajātis* with multiple organizations (e.g., Tamangs, Newars, Gurungs, etc.) have formed or are talking about forming umbrella forums or organizations for themselves. In early 2005, 48 representative *janajāti* organizations were members of the Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN), which is discussed below.

What kinds of *janajāti* organizations exist? In his survey, Mukta S. Tamang (2004a) found fourteen types of organizational entities with different types of focus: religious; culture, development and advocacy; language and literature; social service; songs and music; history and museums; journalism; lawyers; intellectual/civil society; NGOs; women's issues; student affairs; *janajāti* political parties; and ethnic liberation fronts and councils (see also Bhattachan 2001a). What do these organizations do? They do a wide variety of programs in several categories. Some do what could be described as '*janajāti* identity promotional activities' such as celebrations of festivals, birth anniversaries of historical figures, felicitations, holding of literary programs, book exhibitions, and preservation of cultural heritage in museums and elsewhere. Others do 'rights awareness' activism in different domains such as language, religion, census operation, mother tongue education, etc. Some of these organizations also produce posters, pamphlets, bulletins, magazines, journals, and books as part of their activism. Some produce textbooks for informal education, reading materials for primary level classes and booklets on *janajāti* cuisine and festivals (e.g., Kirat Yakthung Chumlung 2002a, 2002b). Others produce media contents in the form of *janajāti* magazines and newspapers or produce popular culture items such as music compact discs and films in various *janajāti* languages. Others produce programs in various languages for radio and television.

Still others are interested in research and dissemination including research in history, culture, language and literature of specific *janajātis*. These organizations also publish items generated through research or reprint earlier writings that have long been out of print. They and others have set-up educational scholarships and conduct training exercises in a

wide variety of issues. Some are organizations set-up to promote the professional interests of *janaajāti* journalists, lawyers or literary writers and while others work on issues that concern *janaajāti* women, students, or religious groups. There are some *janaajāti* organizations which run income generating and savings programs. Others are interested in specific types of social service including literacy classes and various service deliveries. These include ambulance service, treatment and rehabilitation centers for drug addicts, clinics for the treatment of sick people, blood donation drives and various volunteer schemes. No doubt, the entire spectrum of activities matches the diversity of organizational interests found in Nepali society at large.¹⁸ As Mukta S. Tamang (2004a) has noted, there are at least six *janaajāti* political parties, two of which – Rastriya Janamukti Party and Nepal Janamukti Party – have been registered by the Election Commission. The *janaajāti* political parties have been influential in disseminating the issues of the movement in rural Nepal. There are also 15 Ethnic Liberation Fronts, some of whom have ties with political parties including the CPN (Maoists).¹⁹

Who are the individuals involved? According to Mukta S. Tamang (2004a: 1):

The leaders and cadres of these organizations come from various walks of life. Nevertheless, early initiatives appeared to have been led dominantly by school/university teachers, social/religious reformers and politicians. Most of the politicians who undertook the task of organizing ethnic groups left their political careers in left-wing political parties with immense frustration.

Apparently, some of these leaders continue to keep their connections with political parties active with the hope of influencing them while many others have forged new career paths for themselves (Mukta Tamang 2004a). While many members of the leadership in several *janaajāti* organizations were engaged in oppositional politics during the Panchayat years, many from the new generation who are now active do not

18 This and the previous paragraph are based on Subba et al. (2002: 174-175), Janajati (1999), M. Tamang (2004a), Seira Tamang (2004) and various *janaajāti* magazines.

19 Since fall 2001, the Maoists have mentioned nine autonomous regions, six of which – Tharuwan (Tharu), Magarat (Magar), Tamuwan (Gurung), Tamsaling (Tamang), Kirat (Rai and Limbu) and Newar – are ethnic based (see also Gurung 2005b).

necessarily have a background in political mobilization of the student movement or otherwise.

Most of the *janajāti* activists and almost all of the leaders of the *janajāti* organizations (except those formed by women) are male. In fact, it has been reported by researcher Seira Tamang that

Three women *janajāti* leaders have made clear that publicly, *janajāti* men make much of the fact that “men and women are equal” in *janajāti* communities. However, they explicitly rejected this claim, pointing out many areas of existing gender discrimination. They and others have added that when *janajāti* women have tried to form their own organizations, they have faced resistance from their male counterparts.²⁰

What Tamang has reported about the exclusion of *janajāti* women from the mainstream of *janajāti* organizational life had already been noticed by other scholars who have done research on the *janajāti* movement. For instance, the German scholar Karl-Heinz Krämer writes:

Ethnic leaders may argue that, contrary to Hindu society, women have equal rights in ethnic society. But women are not in fact equal to men in Nepal’s ethnic societies nor do they play any significant role in the ethnic organizations. The women’s share in the ethnic leadership is as poor as in the leadership of the political parties (2003a: 196).

Responding to such criticisms, male *janajāti* leaders claim that while there is gender equality at the household level amongst the *janajātis*, the low presence of women in *janajāti* organizations and in leadership positions elsewhere can be explained by the domination of Bahun and Chhetris in Nepali public spheres.²¹ This explanation is not convincing partly because it does not examine the complicity of *janajāti* men in producing the absence of *janajāti* women in leadership positions in *janajāti* organizations.

How are *janajāti* organizations financed? Their activities are executed, in the main, through personal donations of cash, kind, and time by members of the specific *janajāti* groups. Fees are charged for individual memberships in various categories. Those who can pay a lump sum

20 Personal communication, 11 January 2005. For examples of male *janajāti* views on how the women *janajātis* ought to organize in a movement see Bhattachan (2003) and Mabuhang (2003b). For examples of women *janajāti* views on the same theme, see Y. Bhattachan (1999) and Rana Magar (2001, 2003). Also see various contributions in AMA 1999.

21 I have heard this response from *janajāti* men in many public forums since 1995.

amount are often given life memberships. Some individuals have donated land and buildings to specific *janajāti* organizations to enhance their organizational capacity. Others have created trusts or endowments to fund organizational activities (for instance Kirat Yakthung Chumlung is said to have an endowment exceeding five million rupees). However, endowments dedicated to educational or research related activities have remained small even for the case of rich *janajātis* such as the Newars. Very few of the *janajāti* organizations have taken money from foreign donors active in Nepal.

How are these organizations run? Although we do not know enough to answer this question fully, it seems that most organizations do not have a formal voting procedure as part of decision making and the selection of office holders. In a survey of 26 *janajāti* organizations, Gellner and Karki (2004) found that 16 of them had never used voting to choose their leaders, seven had done the exercise only once (out of several possible times) and three more than two times. According to them, voting is avoided

because they are felt to be divisive and that the losers will leave the organization (as has often happened) and set up a rival organization. Voting may also be avoided because it is associated with political parties, which are not respected because they are associated with severe struggles of leadership positions and because they are known to be riven by factionalism and prone to frequent splits (Gellner and Karki 2004: 10-11).

One other reason for lack of voting could be the fact that in many *janajāti* organizations, members from a wealthy background are often asked to lead the organization so that they can make financial contributions personally and furthermore mobilize resources with the help of their wealthy peers.²² Hence in the name of consensus building or meeting the solvency needs of the organization, male *janajāti* leaders run most of the *janajāti* organizations (except those designated as women only) without adequate institutional procedures that engender democratic governance.

After this general discussion, it might be useful to look at the most important federation-style organization of *janajātis*, the Nepal Adivasi Janajati Mahasangh (Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities, NEFIN). NEFIN has been at the forefront of the *janajāti* movement and is thus worthy of our attention here.²³

22 Chaitanya Subba, personal communication, 3 December 2004.

23 For a longer case-study of NEFIN, see Mukta S Tamang (2004b). I have relied on this study and my own research for the following discussion.

Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN)

NEFIN is a federal organization of representative institutions of several *janajāti* groups. In early 2005, 48 *janajāti* organizations were its members and that number has been growing steadily since eight such organizations came together in 1990 to form what was then known as the Nepal Janajati Mahasangh (Nepal Federation of Nationalities, NEFEN). Its mission “is to acquire social equality and justice for Indigenous Nationalities by preserving their distinct social, political, cultural and linguistic identities and by promoting their representation in every aspect of national life” (NEFIN n.d.). Its objectives, mentioned in its revised constitution of 2003, include:

- to formulate common policies and develop leadership for indigenous nationalities by coordinating with their organizations;
- to work with others and assist them to obtain equal development and rights regarding the language, script, religion, culture, literature, education, etc. of various indigenous nationalities of Nepal;
- to persuade HMG/N to implement special programs for the protection, development and economic upliftment of indigenous nationalities;
- to assist in the institutional development of the organizations of indigenous nationalities and empower them;
- to lobby with HMG/N for its compliance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international instruments (NEFIN 2003a: 3; my translation).

After the amendments made in 2003 (which included changing its name to NEFIN from NEFEN), the organizational structure of NEFIN is as follows. Amongst *janajātis* listed in the NFDIN Act 2002, at most one organization representing each can become a member of NEFIN, although its constitution is silent on the criteria it will use to determine which organization is eligible to represent a *janajāti* group with multiple organizations.²⁴ NEFIN has a federal council consisting of one

24 The Newars were represented by the Nepal Bhasa Manka Khala of Kathmandu as one of the founding members of NEFIN in 1990. Later, upon the initiative of Manka Khala itself, another Newar organization, the Newa De Dabu was established in 1995. It grew to become the Newar organization with its membership extended in most districts of the country. By early 2000, 108 Newar organizations had affiliated with Newa De Dabu (Maharjan 2000) and the number has since increased to about 150 (Gellner and Karki 2004). It has replaced the Manka Khala as the representative Newar organization in NEFIN under a non-controversial initiative. However in the case of other *janajāti*

representative from each of its member organizations and the nine office holders of its secretariat who are responsible for its day-to-day operation. The common chair of the council and the secretariat rotates among the member organizations in alphabetical order. In addition to the chair, the secretariat consists of a general secretary and seven other secretaries who look after the various departments: organization; finance; language, literature, art and culture; women, children and health; study and research; public affairs and foreign. These positions are filled via elections during the general assembly which takes place once every three years. There is a provision for granting affiliate memberships to federal organizations of *janajāti* professional, women's, students' and similar institutions. There is also a provision for the establishment of district coordination councils in those districts where at least three of NEFIN's member organizations are located. In late 2004, there were 26 such councils. There is also a provision for the federal council to nominate an advisory committee of up to 11 people including the immediate ex-general secretary.

What has NEFIN done? It would not be possible to list each and every activity and program that NEFIN has organized or made possible. However, in the form of a general characterization, we can say the following, especially for the period since the year 2000. NEFIN has been involved in the advocacy of *janajāti* causes through intellectual forums, celebratory events, rallies, street demonstrations, research and publications. It has led and organized various types of delegations to articulate *janajāti* demands to Nepal governments and international authorities. It has forced the government to form various task forces to look into specific demands of the *janajātis*. It has supported its member organizations through participation in their cultural and other events. It has also been involved in the organizational strengthening of its member organizations and itself (Mukta S. Tamang 2004b: 12).

In addition, NEFIN has interacted with members of the parliament and politicians to lobby for particular *janajāti* demands or to communicate its views on some specific events and policies (NEFIN 1997, 1999). It has promoted *janajāti* festivals and called for a boycott of Hindu festivals such as Dashain. It has protested against compulsory Sanskrit education in schools and has also rallied all *janajātis* to participate in national exercises such as the census of 2001. During its earlier years, NEFIN concentrated its work in the domains of religious freedom, linguistic

groups such as the Gurung, there are controversies that have been discussed publicly in various magazines (e.g. Tamu 2002)

equality and rights and cultural promotion and preservation. In more recent times, it has raised issues related to governance, human rights, biological diversity and indigenous knowledge systems, conflict and peace building, constitutional reform, restructuring of Nepal's political institutions including the electoral system, federalism, affirmative action, social inclusion and the like (Mukta S. Tamang 2004b: 12-13). In May 2004, NEFIN also organized a street demonstration against King Gyanendra's October Raj (i.e. the monarch led political dispensation following the 4 October 2002 sacking of PM Sher Bahadur Deuba), a move that was not supported by all within NEFIN. However those in favor of such a demonstration argued that democracy was a pre-requisite for the *janajāti* movement itself (M. Tamang 2004b: 13-14).

Despite its impressive record, NEFIN has also been criticized by some members of its own constituency in the past. Om Gurung, who was the General Secretary of NEFIN between 2003 and 2006, published an article in the year 2000 in which he stated that in NEFIN's working mode, excessive energy was being spent on seminars and celebratory functions rather than substantial programs for the development of *janajātis*. He argued that instead of working alongside its member organizations, NEFIN seemed to behave more like their patron. In extending its international contacts, NEFIN seemed to engage with international organizations more within the mode of a patron-client relationship rather than a co-traveler in the highway towards equality. Furthermore, Gurung claimed that NEFIN had failed to make any policies and programs for *janajāti* women and children (O. Gurung 2000). Around the same time, Krishna Bhattachan (2001b) pointed out that some of the office holders of NEFIN were getting more used to traveling abroad and living in Kathmandu, rather than visiting the homes of *janajātis* in rural Nepal. He criticized its then leadership for being self-centered, one that also held a monopoly over information flows in the organization. He also said that he was worried about the lack of the effort in NEFIN to lead a 'combative' movement on behalf of the *janajātis*.

In the late 1990s, two major challenges emerged for NEFIN. One was the need to withstand the Maoist hijacking of many of its agenda. At a time when its non-violent methods seemed slow and non-result-producing, NEFIN had to confront the fact that some prominent *janajāti* leaders including its founding general secretary Suresh Ale Magar joined the Maoist party. As the Maoists began to articulate their agenda for the *janajātis*, NEFIN had to figure out a way to counter-balance their extremism with its own style of moderate political engagement (Mukta S.

Tamang 2004b). Second, the NEFIN secretariat led by Parshuram Tamang formed after the third general assembly held in 1996 developed internal cleavages. Several members of the secretariat had problems with Tamang's leadership style and penchant for international travel and linkages while work at home remained in a less-than-full-swing mode. As a consequence the NEFIN secretariat failed to hold a regular general assembly in 1998. However this routine exercise was held in the year 2000 through the intervention of its federal council and advisory committee. Between 1998 and 2001, it almost seemed like that a splintering of NEFIN was inevitable (M. Tamang 2004b). However that has been obviated through the work of the secretariat elected in 2000 (one led by general secretary Balkrishna Mabuhang) and its successor elected in 2003, one led by Om Gurung.

To do its work NEFIN has received support (of small amounts) from several sources over the years. As recently as the six-month period between August 2003 and February 2004, the total budget of NEFIN was under two million rupees (Mukta S. Tamang 2004b: 15). However the scale of NEFIN's budgetary allocation has gone up drastically with the launch of the Janajati Empowerment Project (JEP) in fall 2004. The JEP is the first major donor-supported project targeted for the *janajātis*. It is executed by NEFIN with support from the Enabling State Program (ESP) of DFID Nepal which has committed UK£ 1.52 million over the course of three years (NEFIN 2004a).²⁵ This means on an average, the annual budget of NEFIN will be at least UK£ 0.5 million a year for the next three years which is equivalent to roughly sixty-five million rupees. The project was started in September 2004 following a project development and negotiation process that lasted for over one and half years. In negotiating the JEP with ESP, NEFIN has claimed that the project will address the historical exclusion of *janajāti*s by the Nepali state "by running a number of inter-linked activities." Moreover, the project's

central approach will be to build up the capacity of Janajati organizations to effect and push for change. The many existing Janajati civil society organizations have only had a limited impact because of organizational weaknesses, lack of resources, and their low profile. Project activities will improve their management and their ability to run programmes and raise their credibility. In particular, it will focus on increasing their ability to advocate for Janajatis and to run empowerment programmes. These

25 For background text on how ESP came to support this project, see ESP (2002: Document 3).

activities will be run so that the organizations learn by doing whilst delivering direct benefits, particularly to the most deprived Janajati groups (NEFIN 2004a: 3).

Furthermore the project document states:

This institutional strengthening will help to bring about fundamental changes by increasing Janajati's influence on policy-making. NEFIN is the leading Janajati civil society organization. It is the umbrella organization for the group-specific Janajati NGOs and has a key coordinating and advocacy role. NEFIN has designed this project document. It will be centrally involved in implementing the project, and be a major project beneficiary. This will increase NEFIN's credibility putting it in a much stronger position to promote state policy-making that gives Janajatis a proportionate say in running the state and setting public agendas....Overall, strengthening Janajati organizations will improve Janajati participation in socioeconomic and political processes at all levels. This will result in reduced poverty and the reduced exclusion of Janajati groups (NEFIN 2004a: 3).

Major activities proposed under JEP include institutional strengthening, awareness activities (media training, fellowships, publications of texts, broadcast of programs over radio and TV, etc.), empowerment of highly marginalized *janajāti* groups, advocacy and research. Almost sixty percent of the entire project budget (about UK£ 900,000) is slated for awareness raising/empowerment. The project is being managed by a separate team under a project manager.²⁶ An inception phase of six-months was identified in the project implementation structure to further work out the details of the proposed activities. Since nothing specific is mentioned about enhancing the capacity of women *janajāti* organizations and leaders in the JEP document, one of the things the project managers have been asked to do during the inception phase is to work out the details of how this issue will be tackled by the project.²⁷ Since this phase was still not over at the time of research, it remains to be seen what NEFIN will achieve with this project and how it will coordinate its JEP activities with a wide array of *janajāti* organizations, not all of whom are its members.

According to general secretary Om Gurung, after its launch of JEP, NEFIN's ambitions have grown and to meet them is the organization's

26 Initially this position was filled by Dr Chaitanya Subba.

27 Bimal Tandukar, Program Coordinator, ESP, personal communication, 14 January 2005.

foremost challenge. With the arrival of significant amounts of money in NEFIN, Gurung suspects that non- *janajātis* might claim a *janajāti* status and seek membership in NEFIN. According to him, increasing the number of its members is not in the priority of NEFIN whereas enhancing their organizational capacity is very much the objective of JEP. Another challenge Gurung cites is the lack of clarity amongst NEFIN's members regarding how the rights of the *janajātis* are to be achieved. Some of its members think that the way to move ahead is through social but non-political action whereas he and others think the way ahead is to acquire them as political rights through political mobilization. Giving a balance to these imperatives is one of the other challenges of NEFIN.²⁸ Another challenge facing NEFIN is its lack of mechanism to deal with criticism by its member organizations from the relatively small and worse-off *janajātis* who fear that NEFIN's leadership (the position of the general secretary in particular) will rotate amongst the bigger *janajātis* (e.g., Magar, Tamang, Limbu, Gurung, etc.). In private conversations, these members have informed researchers that they do not feel like their concerns and voices are being given a sympathetic hearing.²⁹

Even more challenging is how NEFIN will respond to the criticism of its male-dominated composition. Since most of its member organizations are led by men, NEFIN's federal council is thoroughly male-dominated. All of its secretariats (what used to be called the executive committee) have been male dominated. The secretariat led by Om Gurung had two women, Lucky Sherpa as the public affairs secretary and Kalpana Kumal as the secretary for women, children and health department. Many of the most vocal *janajāti* women activists have told researchers that within NEFIN (and the *janajāti* movement at large) when they voice their concerns on behalf of *janajāti* women, they are seen to be 'divisive'. Having talked to several *janajāti* women activists, researcher Seira Tamang reports,

28 This paragraph is based on a conversation with Om Gurung, 3 December 2004.

29 I owe this information to Seira Tamang. When asked if this concern was raised during the project negotiation phase of JEP, ESP's Bimal Tandukar has told this writer that this issue did come up and the large percentage of the JEP budget (about UK£ 900,000) slated for the empowerment of highly marginalized *janajātis* through institutional capacity building, student scholarships, etc. reflects the donor's commitment to resolving this problem. Personal communication, 14 January 2005.

at least three interviewees have reported that the dynamics within NEFIN are said to be unfriendly towards women. An older, experienced janajati women activist recalled being publicly humiliated at one janajati meeting by a janajati man, after having said something about the rights of janajati women. One woman affiliated with NEFIN has complained that there is no real activity planned for women, nor a separate budget allocated for that purpose. She and others have stated that the attitude towards women in NEFIN is not very open and that women are really not given much legitimacy or space. Indeed, one of the most respected female janajati activists said she never tried for a position at NEFIN as she felt that nothing could be done for women from inside of the organization.³⁰

These criticisms are indicative of the major challenges facing NEFIN. However it looks like that its leadership has thus far failed to grasp their seriousness as well as institutionalize programs aimed to respond to them.

Nevertheless it must be admitted that even while being severely under-funded and suffering from various organizational challenges as discussed above, the male leadership of NEFIN has managed to provide visible leadership to the *janajāti* movement as a whole. It has also managed to respond to various situational challenges where a clear articulation of a *janajāti* perspective on some 'national' issues was required. Furthermore, by deploying a variety of engagement methods – from civil dialogues to street protests to credible threats – NEFIN's leadership has challenged the Bahun Chhetri dominance of Nepal in a significant manner. It is clear that while in organizational terms, there are some parallel federal institutions in the other social movements (women, dalit), in terms of providing substantial leadership NEFIN's role has no parallel in the other social movements.

Academia

One component of the *janajāti* movement has been the production of public knowledge regarding both the discriminations suffered by the *janajātis* at large and mechanisms of redress the Nepali state needs to adopt to respond to *janajāti* grievances and demands. In this enterprise of knowledge production, a significant number of individuals and a few organizations have played a notable role. A quick survey of the works of academic institutions and writers suggests that most of the academic production related to the *janajāti* movement in Nepal is being done on an individual basis. That is not to say that there aren't some organizational

30 Seira Tamang, personal communication, 11 January 2005.

efforts, but their numbers are small. Individual academics who have made important contributions to the movement include the late Harka Gurung, Krishna Bhattachan, Bairagi Kainla, Bal Krishna Mabuhang, Om Gurung, Chaitanya Subba, Sitaram Tamang, Parshuram Tamang, B.K. Rana, Ganesh M Gurung, Durgahang Yakha Rai, Yasso Kanti Bhattachan, Sumitra Manandhar Gurung, Suresh Ale Magar, Amrit Yonjan-Tamang, Mahendra Lawoti, Mukta S. Tamang, Sanjaya Serchan, T.B. Pun and others.³¹ Not all of the ones named here were or are full time academics. Some were or are associated with Tribhuvan University (K. Bhattachan, Mabuhang, Ganesh M Gurung, Om Gurung) while one teaches outside of Nepal (Lawoti). Some have worked or work for firms that specialize in research or consulting services (late Harka Gurung). Still others are freelance researchers (Subba, Rana, Manandhar Gurung) who make their services available for specific projects on a short-term contract basis.

Many of those named here wear various hats. Some have played key roles in organizations such as NEFIN (Ale Magar, P. Tamang, Mabuhang, Om Gurung). Some have worked in government bodies before managing a major NEFIN project (Subba). Others have been involved in academic production even when affiliated with dominant institutions such as the Royal Nepal Academy (Kainla). Some are also involved in civil society institutions that monitor human rights situation under the present conflict in Nepal (Mukta S. Tamang) or work for the housing rights of the poor (Manandhar Gurung). Some of the above-named and others such as Padma R.Tuladhar and Malla K Sundar have led the fight for linguistic rights for the *jana-jātis*. Some have written for the mainstream print media (B.K. Rana) while others have pursued either the international networking route for advocacy of *jana-jāti* issues (P. Tamang) or the route of politics (Sitaram Tamang), even revolutionary politics of the Nepal Communist Party (Maoist) to advance the *jana-jāti* cause (Ale Magar). There have been some collaborative efforts (e.g. Gurung et al. 2004 and Subba et al. 2002) but their numbers are rather small.

Here it is just possible to highlight some individuals and their work and not provide an overview of the entire oeuvre of the academic work on the *jana-jātis*. Affiliated with the consulting firm New ERA, the late Harka Gurung was very productive in terms of academic writings on various aspects of *jana-jāti* issues. Deploying his characteristic penchant for census and survey data, Gurung highlighted the disparities faced by the

31 One can get a good sense of the set of *jana-jāti* writers by looking at the table of contents of Onta, Yatru and Gautam (2001) and Magar (2003).

janajātis in several data-heavy writings (mostly in English) and elaborated his views on what needed to be done to make Nepal a more equal society from a *janajāti* point of view. These writings have been published in the form of books (Gurung 1998, 2004a), booklets (2003a, 2003c, 2004c) and articles (2000, 2003b, 2004b, 2005a, 2005b, 2006). In collaboration with Malla K Sundar, Krishna Bhattachan and Om Gurung, he also published a document on the strategies that needed to be adopted for the development of *janajātis* (Gurung et al. 2004). This document has been published by the NGO, Nationalities Development and Coordination Center (NDCC) which Gurung headed.

Krishna Bhattachan has been the most visible and vocal academic amongst those raising issues related to the *janajātis*. He has been active in all types of face-to-face interactions and forums and has published widely, both in Nepali and English, on this theme in all kinds of media – mainstream print, *janajāti* print, academic – since 1993 (e.g., Bhattachan 1995, 1996, 1997a, 1997b, 1997c, 1998, 1999a, 1999b, 1999c, 2000a, 2000b, 2000c, 2000d, 2001a, 2003, 2004a, 2004b, 2005). Unlike Harka Gurung, Bhattachan has little faith in the state-generated census data (and calls it ‘mithyanka’ which I suppose is a hybrid of ‘myth’ and ‘tathyanka’, latter being the Nepali language word for statistics). Instead he uses field research and careful content analysis to demolish what he relishes to call ‘Bahunbadi’ interpretations of Nepali history and society. Working like, in his own words, an academic ‘guerrilla’, he invaded the seminar and conference circuits dominated by Bahuns, Chhetris and Newars for much of the 1990s. More than anybody else in the academic community, he deserves the credit for putting ‘ethnopolitics’ squarely in the agenda of mainstream politics in post-1990 Nepal. Bhattachan has also co-edited several volumes, at least one of which (Tamang and Bhattachan 1999) is related entirely to the *janajāti* movement. However, his individual academic essays – several dozens of them – have regrettably been not collected in volumes and are hence not so easily available to researchers and *janajāti* activists.

Bairagi Kainla (e.g., Kainla 2001a, 2001b, 2003) and Amrit Yonjan-Tamang (1998, 1999) have worked on Limbu literature and history and Tamang publications and linguistics. Between them they have produced several books and many articles. In addition to holding several offices in NEFIN including the post of the General Secretary (2000-2003), Balkrishna Mabuhang, a demographer at Tribhuvan University, has published several essays on different aspects of concern to the *janajāti* movement (Mabuhang 1999, 2003a, 2003b) and has led a study of school

curricula and textbooks from a *janajāti* perspective (Mabuhang et al., 2005a, 2005b). His successor as the General Secretary of NEFIN, Om Gurung (2000, 2004) is an anthropologist who teaches at Tribhuvan University. He has also published several essays highlighting various *janajāti* demands. Chaitanya Subba has to his credit several essays (e.g. Subba 2003a, 2003b) and was the coordinator of the important preparatory document on the *janajātis* for the Tenth Plan (Subba et al. 2002). This document remains one of the most important academic reviews of the *janajāti* movement to date. B.K. Rana (1999) has written on several aspects of the *janajāti* movement. Among senior women academics, Yasso Kanti Bhattachan and Sumitra Manandhar Gurung have written a joint paper recently (Bhattachan and Gurung 2004) on the position of minorities in relation to the Constitution of Nepal and Bhattachan has also written a paper on the participation of *janajātis* in decision-making in Nepal (Y. Bhattachan 2005). However their output and that of other women academics on subjects related to the *janajātis* is rather small.

Among the academics who have begun to write on the *janajāti* theme in the last five years, Mahendra Lawoti has taken up the issue of how to reconfigure the political institutions of Nepal to make them more inclusive. He has done so in several academic and non-academic articles and a book (e.g., Lawoti 2002, 2003, 2005). Another academic in this cohort is Mukta Singh Tamang who has provided insightful overviews of the *janajāti* movement in several articles (2003, 2004g) and case studies of specific institutions and programs (2004a, 2004b, 2004c, 2004d, 2004e, 2004f). Another writer in this group is Sanjay Serchan (2001) who has published a book on *janajāti* aspirations in post-1990 Nepal. T.B. Pun (2004) has given a *janajāti* reading of some of the canonical texts of Nepali literature. It is unfortunate that in this cohort, no women academics seem to be present.

There aren't too many *janajāti* organizations that focus their work on the production of academic resources. The only one with a declared agenda of this nature is the Nationalities Development and Coordination Center (NDCC) of which the late Harka Gurung was the convener and Krishna Bhattachan the member secretary. NDCC's primary focus is to create "intellectual resources" and to work "as a think-tank on ethnic issues." It provides "necessary suggestions to ethnic groups" through the involvement of ethnic intellectuals (Gurung et al. 2004: 26). While it has organized several interaction programs on *janajāti* issues, its main publication thus far has been *Development of Nationalities: A Strategy*

Paper (Gurung et al. 2004), originally published in Nepali in 2000 and translated into English recently. However, this or any other *janajāti* organization does not seem to be engaged in any serious mentoring exercise as far as the preparation of next generation of *janajāti* researchers is concerned.

In terms of organizational involvement, some non-*janajāti* organizations (i.e., organizations whose primary work area is not designated as *janajāti* focused) have produced academic resources that are useful to the *janajāti* movement. This includes several papers published by the Nepal Centre for Contemporary Studies (NCCS) on *janajāti* themes (e.g., Kainla 2001b, Khanal 2004a, Kunwar 2059v.s.), the conference proceedings on inclusive democracy published by the Social Science Baha (Mainali 2004) and the volume edited by Dilli Ram Dahal (1999) consisting of research sponsored by the Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies (CNAS) of Tribhuvan University. In this corpus we can also include the *janajāti* reader, a compilation of writings on various themes generated by the *janajāti* movement prepared by the Martin Chautari (MC) and the Centre for Social Research and Development (CSR) (Onta, Yatru and Gautam 2001). Such organizations have also executed opinion poll surveys (MSI 2000) and research on specific themes related to the *janajātis*. For the case of media, two NGOs, CSR and MC have produced a volume that consists of articles discussing the participation and representation of *janajātis* in print media and radio (Onta and Parajulee 2001). In such projects, both *janajāti* (e.g., Yatru 2001, 2004) and non-*janajāti* (Parajulee and Gautam 2001, Parajulee 2001) writers have been involved in the production of intellectual resources that are useful for the expansion of the domain of the *janajāti* movement as well as for policy considerations.³² The media research on social exclusion and the *janajāti* reader mentioned above were both components of a single project.

It is often stated that the absence of good data on the *janajātis* is part of the reason why useful programs have not been conceptualized and executed by the Nepal government and non-governmental entities. The

32 There is a substantial body of writings on the *janajātis* and related issues by non-Nepali academics but I will not discuss them here as they fall outside of the remit of this article. For examples of edited volumes of such writings, see Gellner, Pfaff-Czarnecka and Whelpton (1997), Gellner (2003), and Lecomte-Tilouine and Dollfus (2003). For examples of recent relevant monographs, see Fisher (2001) and Guneratne (2002).

effort to generate such knowledge, in the early days of the *janajāti* movement, had come, not surprisingly, from *janajāti* scholars. Only later have scholars from other communities of Nepal joined the enterprise. The production of these intellectual resources has enabled serious deliberations on the inequalities faced by the *janajātis*. These products of academics and their participation in the *janajāti* movement have no doubt made the movement a relatively successful one.³³

Media

Both mainstream media and alternative *janajāti* media have played a role in making the *janajāti* movement and its demands more visible in Nepali society. While the mainstream media might have done this reluctantly and unintentionally, the *janajāti* media has done so aggressively and purposefully. In this section I examine both kinds of media briefly with respect to how they relate to the growth of the *janajāti* movement in post-1990 Nepal.

Mainstream media has been a very important post-1990 development in Nepal with respect to the creation of a public sphere in which the work done by various social movements has had an opportunity for amplification. The growth of independent media owned by the private sector and the non-government sector has put an end to state-monopoly on print and broadcast media and has, within certain limitations, contributed in the gradual democratization of Nepali society. However, there are several structural characteristics of Nepali media that bear upon its potential as a vibrant democratic force in general (Onta 2002). These include the spatial concentration of its production in Kathmandu, the large scale absence of social minorities in its workforce, the increasing dominance of the private sector in terms of ownership, and the lack of first-class educational and journalism training amongst the media personnel. By minority representation in the workforce, I am referring to the fact that there is a disproportionate absence of women and members of

33 Further academic work on the inequalities faced by the *janajātis* and policies that need to be adopted to redress them is of course necessary. For that to happen, it is important to attract a new generation of *janajāti* scholars to become serious students of Nepali society and analyze it mercilessly around issues highlighted by the *janajāti* movement. Equally important would be to attract non-*janajāti* scholars of all generations and challenge them to pursue research and academic deliberations on the same themes. On how a new generation of scholars can be trained outside of the university, see Onta (2005).

specific caste and ethnic communities as well as representatives from the madhesh – namely, dalits, *janajātis* and madhesis – in the mainstream media workforce in Nepal.

Journalists in Nepal tend to be overwhelmingly male and from the Bahun, Chhetri and Newar (BCN) caste groups. In the 104 mainstream publications surveyed in late 2000 in the Kathmandu Valley and 22 other cities of Nepal, researchers found that *janajātis* constituted about 15 percent of the editorial staff, 22 percent of the managerial staff and 12 percent of the columnists (Parajulee and Gautam 2001). However when they separated Newars from the *janajāti* category, all the three statistics regarding the participation of *janajātis* in mainstream print media came to around 10 percent or less. The same survey revealed that in print media, women constitute about five per cent of the workforce in the editorial department. However the presence of non-Newar *janajāti* women is almost zero. Although similar surveys for the case of radio in Nepal have not been conducted, suggestive data generated by Kumar Yatra (2001, 2004) shows that the scenario in terms of *janajāti* representation in the radio industry is not much different. In the last two years, a larger number of women have been hired by the new FM stations as presenters of entertainment programs but the number of women, especially *janajāti* women, doing radio journalism (namely, news and talk shows) remains very small. A 2005 survey done on the television industry has revealed that *janajāti* participation is over 38 per cent, namely, larger than the *janajāti* share in the entire population (Upreti forthcoming). While this looks like a much better statistics of *janajāti* representation, a closer look reveals that only 13 of the 59 *janajātis* listed in the NFDIN schedule were present in the television industry. Amongst the *janajātis* working in this industry, more than 76 per cent were Newars.³⁴

The above discussion suggests that the caste/ethnicity constitution of Nepali media institutions does not correspond with that of the Nepali society. What is even worse is that most mainstream media institutions, elected officials of the professional bodies of journalists and media trainers, until very recently, did not even consider this mismatch to be a

34 Others who had a presence include Tamangs (5.6 per cent), Magars (4.5 per cent), Gurungs (3 per cent), and Tharus (2 per cent). Researcher Upreti found that while *janajātis* were present in management positions in the TV industry, they were all Newars in Kantipur TV and Image Channel and mostly Newars in Channel Nepal (75 per cent) and Nepal Television (91 per cent) (forthcoming: table 4).

problem.³⁵ The overwhelming presence of Bahun, Chhetri and Newar males in the world of Nepali media means that concerns and voices of women, dalits, *janajātis* and madhesis are not adequately represented in all media products and institutions (cf. C. Gurung 2003). This structural trait limits the functional capacity of Nepali media institutions to be a full pro-*janajāti* and pro-democratic force (Lawoti and Yatru 2001, and Yatru 2001, 2004).

Nevertheless, in response to the social pressure created by the *janajāti* movement, the mainstream media was forced to accommodate *janajāti* voices and concerns a bit. This came, in part, because of the recommendations made by two commissions formed by the Nepal government in the mid-1990s. In its report finalized in April 1994, the 11-member National Language Policy Recommendation Commission (NLPRC) headed by Til Bikram Nembang (alais Bairagi Kainla) recommended various activities to develop and strengthen the different national languages, particularly those which were endangered or did not have a written tradition. It also called for the gradual expansion of mass media contents in the national languages (Nembang et al. 1994).³⁶ The following month, in May 1994, the committee to formulate suggestions for news broadcast in national languages over the state-owned Radio Nepal submitted its report (Acharya et al. 1994). This committee, headed by Narahari Acharya, recommended that Radio Nepal broadcast news in eight additional national languages including Bhojpuri, Tharu, Awadhi, Tamang, Rai-Bantawa, Magar, Limbu and Gurung (in addition to the then existing broadcasts in Nepali, Hindi, Maithili, Newari and English). This was implemented by Radio Nepal from mid-August 1994 when it started broadcasting news programs in the above languages from its regional stations located in Dhankuta, Kathmandu, Pokhara, and Surkhet. In recent years, news broadcast in some *janajāti* languages has been done from the

35 This issue is discussed by Parajulee and Gautam (2001) at length. Kantipur Publications, Nepal's premier print media institution, has no official proactive policy to recruit *janajāti* journalists (Narayan Wagle, editor of *Kantipur*, personal communication, 8 December 2004). However it is unofficially trying to recruit more *janajāti* journalists and the number of *janajātis* who work for it has been gradually increasing since 2000. Unfortunately all of them are male. In early 2005, no *janajāti* or woman journalist was employed in Himalmedia's premier publication, *Himal Khabarpatrika*.

36 For more recent views on this theme by the convener of this commission, see Kainla (2001a).

central studio of Radio Nepal in Kathmandu (Yatru 2004).³⁷ Some educational programs in *janajāti* languages have been broadcast from its regional stations. In 2004, regional and national broadcasts of Radio Nepal included various entertainment programs in eight *janajāti* languages (Yatru 2004). Nevertheless the total time allotted to broadcast in *janajāti* languages – both for news and entertainment – amounted to a tiny percentage of the total broadcast hours of Radio Nepal.³⁸

There has also been a growth of *janajāti* language programs in FM radio. In the Kathmandu Valley, this growth has taken place in Newari/Nepal Bhasa and Tamang and in other parts of Nepal, this has happened in other *janajāti* languages. According to Basanta Maharjan (2002), Nepal Bhasa programs in FM radios have rejuvenated interest in their language amongst Newars who were on the verge of giving up on their language. Such programs have advanced the Nepal Bhasa movement to a new level by creating a Newar public larger than the erstwhile small group of hardcore language and literary activists. Maharjan also adds that FM broadcasting in Nepal Bhasa has increased the production volume of Newar music and songs by many folds.

Much the same has happened from Tamang language broadcast over FM radios. In mid-2005, more than ten FM stations around the country were broadcasting programs in Tamang. The number of individuals involved in the production of programs in Tamang was about 40. Almost half of them are women and most of them were in their mid-twenties (Pratik Tamang 2005). According to Pratik D. Tamang, the growth in Tamang language programs over FM radio stations is driven primarily by a spontaneous “we have to do something” variety of emotional commitment on the part of a new generation of Tamang media and other activists. These radio programs have inspired a new generation of Tamangs to write literature in their own language and create music and songs as well. They have contributed to the forging of a new Tamang identity, one which its adherents can be proud of (Pratik Tamang 2005).

37 The Acharya committee also recommended that Radio Nepal broadcast news in other languages provided that the necessary pre-requisites and human resources become available in the future (Acharya et al. 1994). A language was included in the recommendation for broadcast if the number of its speakers exceeded one percent of the entire population of Nepal according to the census of 1991. For further details on the recommendations of the NLPRC and the Radio Nepal committee, see Sonntag (1995).

38 See Yatru (2001 and 2004) for further details and analysis of programming in *janajāti* languages in Radio Nepal.

Tamang talk shows have covered many aspects of Tamang culture and economy as well as issues raised by the *janajāti* movement as they relate to the Tamangs.³⁹ Although I have only discussed the case of Nepal Bhasa and Tamang, I suspect that broadcast in other *janajāti* languages in many FM stations all over Nepal is creating a similar effect. Television broadcasting in *janajāti* languages, however, has not been able to graduate from the level of mere tokenism thus far.

With respect to print media, Lawoti and Yatru (2001) have concluded that while mainstream print media publishes feature articles related to the *janajātis* as fillers, it has mostly remained silent on the major demands raised by the *janajāti* movement. According to them, occasionally the print media covers news and analysis that portrays the *janajāti* movement as one that tries to create differences in Nepali society with respect to languages, religion and politics. While agreeing that the number of reports and analyses carried by the print media on *janajāti* issues is small, media researcher Shekhar Parajulee (2001) has concluded that it has managed to contribute a bit to the advancement of the *janajāti* movement. This, he suggests, has been done via their routine reporting of the activities of *janajāti* organizations. Apart from establishing the social profile of these organizations, these reports have informed the readers about activities related to the movement and have created an environment in which they (i.e., readers) interact with movement activists. He concludes that op-ed articles, mostly written by *janajāti* writers, have managed to clarify some of the issues related to language, culture and religion as raised in the *janajāti* movement. While acknowledging that there are serious limitations to what print media has been able to do both in terms of reporting and serious investigative pieces regarding *janajāti* demands, Parajulee also adds that investigative reports have highlighted the specific cultural salience of various *janajātis*. In other words, even as the *janajāti* presence is small in the newsrooms of the mainstream media, its contribution to advancing the *janajāti* movement is not insignificant.

Access to mainstream media being difficult, activists promoting *janajāti* causes have found it easier to start alternative low-circulation publications in Nepali or a specific *janajāti* language. Although some

39 According to Pratik Tamang, a Tamang broadcaster, most of the production of Tamang programs is being done in a voluntary basis and there has been very little help from and coordination with the major Tamang organizations who seem to lack a vision regarding how to use radio for their movement. Personal communication, 14 January 2005. See also Pratik D. Tamang (2005).

newspapers have also been published, most of these publications are magazines. Some of the titles of these publications include: *Ādivāsī*, *Ādivāsī Āwāj*, *Ādivāsī Janajāti Mañc*, *Ādivāsī Mahilā Āwāj*, *Ādivāsī Mañc*, *Chāharā*, *Char-gyam*, *Chināmakhu*, *Chumluṅ*, *Hāmro Rodhī*, *Hisī*, *Janajāti*, *Janajāti Āwāj*, *Janajāti Lahar*, *Janajāti Mañc*, *Jognī*, *Kairan*, *Kānuñ Lām*, *Kirat Samacar*, *Kirat Sandesh*, *Koñpī*, *Koñja Marum*, *Māṭo*, *Lāphā*, *Libju-Bhumju*, *Magar Jāgaran*, *Nāgarik*, *Paru Hang*, *Tamang Times*, *Tamang Today*, *Tamu Nhasan*, *Tamu Sun Tan*, *Thāru Saṃskriti*, *Rājyasattā*, *Rāṣṭra*, *Rodhī*, *Roś*, *Sālpā*, *Sālpā Phulbāri*, *Sherpa Pratibimba*, and *Yalambar*.⁴⁰ Most of these publications do not survive beyond the first few issues (M. Gurung 2004, Yonjan-Tamang 1998, G. Rai 2000, Sarvahari forthcoming). There are some magazines such as *Janajāti Mañc* and *Libju-Bhumju* who survive to publish their 25th issues.⁴¹ *Janajāti* journalistic effort is dispersed in the production of various small publications and none of them is influential enough to be the *janajāti*-agenda setter. None of the *janajāti* magazines published in Nepali have managed to develop an important presence in the mainstream media market.

Despite the short lives of *janajāti* publications and their lack of influence in the mainstream media market, it is still the case that they have transgressed the dominant public domain in Nepal with *janajāti* concerns. What Mary Des Chene said a decade ago about Tamu (Gurung) magazines holds true for all *janajāti* magazines:

These writings are also the place to turn...for the developing cultural analyses that are forming a basis for collective positions on language policy, religion and the state, and other issues regarding the rights of *janajātis* within the Nepali state (1996: 121).

In other words, *janajāti* publications have played an important role in disseminating various views and analyses within the *janajāti* groups and to other Nepalis who have been interested in the *janajāti* movement. They have been the avenue in the enlarged Nepali public sphere through which *janajāti* demands and identities have been articulated. They have helped to clarify and legitimize ethno-politics in post-1990 Nepal. They have

40 Names of many *janajāti* publications can be found in Ganesh Rai (2000). Details of Tamang and Tharu publications can be found in Yonjan-Tamang (1998, 1999) and Sarvahari (forthcoming), respectively.

41 For various opinions about *Janajāti Mañc*, see its 25th issue. Some of the articles published in *Janajāti Mañc* have now been collected in a volume (B. Magar 2003).

also provided on-the-job training to *janajāti* journalists. Individuals such as Pradeep Thapa Magar who used to single-handedly edit the Magar magazine *Lapha* and guest-edit some other *janajāti* magazines and Bal Krishna Kaucha Magar who edited *Janajāti Mañc* have been important actors in *janajāti* print media.⁴²

Several organizational initiatives have been taken by *janajāti* journalists that have implications for both how the mainstream and *janajati* media have reported and participated in the *janajāti* movement of the most recent part. The most significant initiatives include the founding of the Association of Nepalese Indigenous Nationalities Journalists (ANIJ) in 1999 and the Tamang Media Group in 2004. One of the main objectives of ANIJ is to provide professional leadership to all *janajāti* journalists working in Nepal and to fight for their professional rights and welfare (Ghale 2006). In addition ANIJ hopes to increase the number of *janajāti* journalists by encouraging them to join the profession. In early February 2000, while providing suggestions to a media task force constituted by the Nepal government ANIJ recommended that the state should arrange for journalism training for *janajāti* journalists (ANIJ 2000). ANIJ also argued that *janajāti* publications that want to establish their own press should get grants and loans from the Media Development Fund managed by the Press Council Nepal.

In early 2005 ANIJ had chapters in about 18 districts, involving *janajāti* journalists who are working in mainstream print media. According to its general secretary Khim Ghale, ANIJ has provided orientation training to *janajāti* journalists about the issues raised by the *janajāti* movement.⁴³ It has also provided short-term training to *janajāti* individuals who are interested in pursuing journalism as a career and a few of these trainees were working for ANIJ's weekly publication, *Indigenous Voice*. This weekly is read by those interested in the *janajāti* movement.⁴⁴ It is also trying to do a survey of *janajāti* journalists working in different parts of the country so that with a better knowledge regarding their numbers and qualifications, ANIJ can then approach mainstream

42 It has also been said that *janajāti* journalists could possibly do much more to strengthen various *janajāti* languages through their work (Rai 2004a). For a discussion of Rai journalists, see Rai (2004b). The work done by *janajātis* in the visual media deserves attention but is not covered here due to my lack of knowledge.

43 Personal communication, 2 January 2005.

44 Based on conversation with Basanta Maharjan, vice-chair for the central region, ANIJ, 16 January 2005.

media institutions and ask them to adopt a pro-*janajāti* recruitment policy. It has also conducted an orientation meeting with several *janajāti* organizations regarding how they should interact with media institutions to get coverage of their activities.

According to Basanta Maharjan, vice chair of ANIJ for the central region, ANIJ has succeeded in highlighting the needs and demands of *janajāti* journalists by bringing them together in a single forum.⁴⁵ However, it has not been able to raise adequate funds to pay for the activities it wants to execute. In its five years of existence, it does not seem that ANIJ has made much progress regarding the devising of schemes to increase the number of *janajāti* journalists in mainstream media nor does it seem to have made much progress in terms of building bridges with mainstream media organizations and media training programs, both of which are concentrated in Kathmandu. Instead the emphasis seems to be organizational expansion across the country. Perhaps what is at work here is an effort to emulate the organizational structure of mainstream media institutions such as the Federation of Nepalese Journalists, Press Chautari, and the like.⁴⁶

Another *janajāti* media organization, Tamang Media Group (TMG) was established in 2004 (registered in the district of Lalitpur). The main objective of TMG is to enhance the qualifications and skills of Tamang media personnel. It also hopes to consolidate the voice of the Tamang community by bringing together all Tamang communicators who work in various media institutions (Pratik Tamang 2006). In mid-2006, TMG had a 13-person central executive committee and a 27-person central committee. Its members include those who work in print and broadcast media (especially radio). TMG has organized basic journalism trainings, various discussion programs and co-hosted an exhibition of Tamang publications. Similar to ANIJ, most of the office holders of TMG have full-time jobs (either in the field of journalism or elsewhere) and can afford to pursue their organizational goals only part of the time. This

45 Personal communication, 16 January 2005.

46 This conclusion is based on a discussion held at Martin Chautari on 22 July 2004 in which one of the main speakers was Chandra Singh Kulung, the chair of ANIJ. It is also based on conversation with Khim Ghale, 2 January 2005 and Basanta Maharjan, 16 January 2005.

constraint severely handicaps their abilities to execute necessary programs and find the finances to run them.⁴⁷

Conclusion

In this article I have argued that the relative success of the *janajāti* movement in post-1990 Nepal can be attributed to the work of the *janajāti* organizations and especially NEFIN, academia and media. NEFIN's leadership in organizing the *janajātis* in the form of a federal organization, the clarification of the *janajāti* demands through academic outputs and practice, and the amplification of those demands and the movement at large through both mainstream and *janajāti* media have been the constituting factors that have made the *janajāti* movement much more successful than the women's and dalit movements in post-1990 Nepal. This particular configuration of these intermediate institutions was not the outcome of a single master-plan for the *janajāti* movement. Nor is the case, as I demonstrated amply, that they are devoid of internal contradictions and confusion. The work of these institutions demands the kind of scholarly attention I have given here because they are part of the much larger and complex social dynamics of the intermediate level of Nepali society in post-1990 Nepal. Without understanding these dynamics, any attempt to come to a full understanding of what has happened in Nepal since the end of the Panchayat system in 1990 would be futile.

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47 Rudra Singh Tamang, personal communication, 4 July 2004, 22 July 2004 and 10 January 2005. See also Pratik Tamang (2006).

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