

# **Emerging Community: Region and Urban Identities in Nepal**

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## **Short Introduction of Nepal**

Nepal, home to Mount Everest, is dominated by the world's most imposing mountains. Although the country is relatively small (147,181 square kilometers), 80 percent of its territory is occupied by the dramatic peaks of the Himalayas. Nepal was closed to foreign visitor until 1951, a situation which contributed greatly to its mystique in the west. This small, hospitable country has since become an exceptionally popular destination for travelers, whether they are in search of climbing challenges or spiritual enlightenment. But now it has become a place of cultural and political research for the academicians by national and international. Nepal can be divided into three geographical regions, each stretching from east to west across the country. The southernmost strip of land, the Terai\*\*\*, is bordered to the north by Himalayan foothills and to the south by the Ganges River. The area was originally covered with tropical vegetation, but has been almost completely converted to agricultural production. The central section of Nepal is formed by the Mahabharat\*\*\* Chain, a range of mountains that reach modest altitudes of 2,000-3,000 meters. Farming has become an important activity in the area; terraced farms produce rice, corn and wheat.

The Kathmandu Valley, a stretch of green in the middle of the Mahabharat, is home to Nepal's capital and other historic cities. The Himalayas stretch across the northern section of Nepal. Eight of the ten highest peaks in the world are located here, and most are covered with permanent snowfields. The area is sparsely populated, with little vegetation above the tree-line (4,200 meters).

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*Terai; bottom part of Nepal which is closed to Indian boarder  
Mahabharat; the line between Hill and terai region*

The climate varies considerably with elevation. May to October is monsoon season, when rain soaks the Terai and snow falls on the Himalayan peaks. Mid-October to mid-December is prime mountaineering weather: the skies are clear and sunny, temperatures range from warm in the lowlands to crisp in the mountains. March and April are also good months for mountain treks, although temperatures in Kathmandu and the Terai tend to be steamy. Nepal's 28 million inhabitants belong to dozens of different ethnic groups. They can be divided roughly into Hindu peoples (who live mainly in the lowlands) and Buddhists, who live in mountain villages close to Tibet. Hindus, who make up 90 percent of the population, dominate political and religious life. But Buddhism has a special connection to Nepal: Siddhartha Gautama, who was later revered as the Buddha, was born in the Lumbini Zone\*\*\* in 543 BC. Perhaps the most well-known Buddhist ethnic groups are the Sherpa, who have long been associated with Himalayan mountaineering expeditions.

The vast majority of Nepal's population makes a living from subsistence agriculture. When democracy came in 1990 and Nepal's active kingdom rule had transferred to the ceremonial, few years later the king Birendra's family was assassinated and his brother had come to the crown. But the same time in Nepal, Communist Party of Maoist started their militia war which scuttled for a decade between government and the communist party of Maoism. Later king became again authoritative and got the power in his hand. On the other hand, to abolish king from Nepal the all political parties including Maoist signed with the peace process held in New Delhi in India in 2006 and they run a nationwide protest against king and finally Nepal become federal democratic country without king with the ceremonial president. Political parties have carried out two times constituent assembly and made a new constitution recently in September 20, 2015. But unfortunately, On April 25, a 7.8 magnitude earthquake struck Nepal, followed two weeks later by a 7.3 tremor. Almost 12,000 lives were lost, estimated that million people are injured and entire villages turned to rubble. Aftershocks are still a part of daily life. People have already been through so much, and countless households are bracing for monsoons without shelter, disease is a serious threat, and displaced children are easy targets for traffickers. UNICEF recently said three million children are still living at the public shelter and out of school, it's because of earthquake and latest Indian blocked for Nepal. Now there is snow falling and many people are dying without food and enough warm clothes. Those all things are the negative circumstances happening in Nepal but beside these, Nepal are doing a multiple enhancement in different ways. Education, multimedia, and tourism are the most attractive triumphs in the last decade. But emerging population, ethnic conflict, political crisis, rural-urban issues, internal migration and brain drain are the major challenges for the Nepal government. Hence, in this paper, I would like to describe a short issue about the urban-region identity and the emerging community in Nepal.

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*Lumbini Zone; birth place of Lord Buddha in Nepal*

## **Emerging Community: Urban and Regional Identity**

## **Background of the Study**

Massey (1992) writes that conflicts over regional, religious, and ethnic identities, political struggles and emancipatory movements, class struggles, and struggles over livelihoods play out in urban space, but they also question the “grand narratives” regarding the temporalization of space. By pointing this description of space in time, the stories of conflicts and struggles in Nepali emerging cities stress a line of reasoning wherein one could analyze rural-urban and urban-regional linkages and global flows concomitantly. The debate over Nepal’s economic liberalization has dwarfed significant social transformations and political changes since the 1990s, wherein the king’s arbitrary phase finished and democratic and open market policy have risen to power in Nepali market, irrevocably altering the political landscape of symbols, language, styles of mobilization, and alignments. Not only those things had happened by the new government but also in somehow Maoist movement has created a kind of political awareness and brought a power of female and ethnic and Dalit\*\*\* in the main stream.

These changes have, in turn, created new urban-rural and urban-regional networks and connections or reinforced older ones. This article attempts to interpret and recon figure notions of rural, urban, and region in light of these political trends with a special focus on the centre and region such as Hill and terai market places. Needless to say, the rising political and economic aspirations of regional or rural elites have been recognized to have played a role in the regionally differentiated growth patterns of the post-open market policy period, the spatial implications in terms of domestic capital flows, their specific iterations in space, and redrawing of the relationship between rural and urban areas and their diverse regional linkages have not been adequately researched. The interconnections between agrarian capital and global finance and their geographical effects are also not well understood. Studies of the region in Nepal have been almost exclusively the domain of geographers and demographers with a few spatially inclined economists also contributing and they were almost either British or American for example Toni Hagen\*\*\*.

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### ***Dalit; Untouchable caste in Nepal***

***Toni Hagen; After taking a diploma in engineering and geology from the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich, he took a doctorate in the geology of the Welsh mountains and then became a research assistant at the Zurich Geological Institute. Hagen first visited Nepal in 1950 with a first Swiss development assistance mission. In 1952 he was employed by the government of Nepal and also worked for the United Nations. He explored the geography of that Himalayan state.***

## **Regionalism or Federalism: Urban-Rural/Territorial Debate in Nepal**

In 1990, the first great movement, called Jana Andolan, brought multi-party democracy back to Nepal. The constitution of the kingdom of Nepal (1990) lifted the ban on political parties, described a democratic representative system where the authority of the king was curtailed, and enshrined fundamental rights. Although the 1990 constitution substantially increased the democratic character of the state in comparison with the Panchayat Regime\*\*\*, critiques have argued that this text did not adequately represent all sectors of society, even though Nepal is a multi-cultural country where diverse social groups coexist. In the aftermath of the return of democracy to Nepal in the late 2000s and the abolition of the monarchy, regional decentralization and federalism has become a contentious topic of political debate at the national level.

The federal system of government is a type of government where the government is divided into states with autonomous power. Nepal will be divided into three governments such as: 1} federal/central government 2} state government and 3} local development. The division of power between the federal and the state government is determined according to the clauses mentioned in the constitution.

The central/federal government is responsible for the security of the border, foreign affairs, army, nation's economy etc. on the other side the state government is responsible for the state's internal security, daily administration, to preserve local arts and culture to operate state level projects and so on. This will be the best way to develop the nation. If it is divided in the concept of skilled manpower natural resources and means of production it will be best solution for the Nepal.

## **Necessity of Federalism/ Regionalism in Nepal**

Nepal is practicing a unitary form of government since a long period of time. This system hasn't been able to achieve the aimed objectives and rapid development in the country. It has been unable to address the will and aspiration of the Nepalese people. Nepal is a hub culture society. People of various languages, ethnic groups, cultures, and traditions are the resident of Nepal. Their practices, traditions, cultures and languages are in the verge of extinction. So, federalism has been felt the only solution for their preservation and protections after the new constitution is drafted. When the new constitution has promulgated in September 20 in 2015 there are several circumstances have been seen.

The promulgation of the new constitution was immediately followed by virtual blockade of all checkpoints at Nepal-India border. Various Human Rights Activists and some ethnic groups in lowland Nepal have accused the Constitution of being gender discriminatory especially in regards to citizenship provisions. They allege new constitution makes it difficult for woman to pass on citizenship to their children as compared to men. But this is one of the examples of the new democratic federal republic constitution in the world according to the parliament house. Ninety percent of parliament members have signed and various rights have given to Dalit, Muslim, female, Madhesi people\*\*\* and ethnic people.

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***Panchayat Regime; King's active regime before 1990***

***Madhesi people; those people who live in the southern part of Nepal and it is the border area with India***

But Madhesi and indigenous population view that the new constitution fails to address demands of marginalized communities and support status-quo of the ruling groups. They are protesting

mainly over the federal delineation of new states as proposed in the constitution fearing existing demarcation could affect their political representation. With the protest ongoing since August 15, 2015 or earlier, at least 45 people, including 8 security personals and one Indian National, have been killed. Human Rights Watch has criticized the Nepal Government as well as the protesters for violation of human rights during the protest. Additionally, there is controversy over Nepalese citizenship rules, which Nepal deems to protect the state from being overwhelmed by Indian immigrants, and which India claims discriminates against Madhesis of Indian origins, the draft constitution and final constitution that passed differ on this issue.

### **Regional Inequality: Theoretical Issues**

As referred to earlier, several studies have explored the regional inequalities in Nepal, and indeed different approaches and time periods have been employed. Some researchers calculated and decomposed the regional per capita income coefficient for just rural Nepal during the last periods. The primary finding of earlier studies paper was that income distributions in rural Nepal have become more biased as a result of economic reforms. Reportedly, more than one-half of the inequality in the national income, in fact, it was a direct result of inter-regional inequality, while three-quarters of the inter-regional inequality was due to inter-zone inequality. The uneven development of enterprises in both townships and villages had seemingly been a major factor in the increased inequality in regional income.

### **Inequality between Urban and Rural Region**

The regional dimension of inequality, rural/urban has been increasing in Nepal. Nepal's dramatic growth of economy (even though it is suffering from different political fluctuation, earthquake, and blocked of India) and poverty reduction after 1990s has been accompanied by growing inequality which threatens the social compact and thus the political basis for economic growth and social development. As a hot issue, regional inequality has come to appear large in the policy debate in Nepal. Nepal's rate of economic growth during the last decade of a century has reached with other countries like Bangladesh and some others African underdeveloped countries for a similar experience for their economies. The inadequate city planning of the government in Nepal fails to reduce the regional disparities between urban and rural areas. The issue of social harmony, demographic unity and regional-cooperation has been breaking up due to the changing in socio-economic way of life, rapid migration and fragile political system that creates the multi-dimensional debate in the country. These things have raised some issues about the urban regional identities which are slowly conceptualized as an emerging community subject in academic field now days to be analyzed. Rural-urban distinctions constitute a key aspect of social science theorizations of social order irrespective of the ideological or epistemological basis of conceptualizations. Theories of urban bias are as current and popular as are those which attribute persisting rural poverty to a range of structural factors, especially in countries in south Asia. Contemporary social science in Nepal largely ignores rural-urban connections, networks, and linkages, often influencing policy positions, as well as those of social movements and civil society organizations.

Both capital and politics deeply imbricate cities and villages with proximate and distant regions, even as these imbrications vary with time, social transformations, and economic changes. While historical factors, including rural large agricultural land settlements, infrastructure influenced

growth of production forces, and social reform, have shaped the dynamism, stagnation, or sluggishness of social formations and regions their spatial implications for rural-urban and city-region linkages, as well as the spatiality of capital flow and political developments in Nepal, have not been adequately studied or understood. I want to show some reasons that interpret why government has failed to make a systematic city planning schemes in Nepal. The government of Nepal does not have concrete and systematic planning guidelines in order to expand the modern cities in Nepal.

According to Upadhaya (1991), the Government of Nepal carried out the first systematic analysis of urbanization in 1984 in Nepal through the financial assistance of USAID. Upadhya further mentions a task force was set up in late 1984 to prepare a recommended Urban Policy Statement for inclusion in the Seventh Development Plan (1985 - 1990). Consequently, the Seventh Development Plan partially adopted the policies recommended by the task force for the first time in the country. Urban studies in Nepal have been the role of the politics of dominance and resistance, especially those centered on intra-rural conflicts in affecting urban processes and spatial practices. Caste-based/factional, intra-class, and other intra-rural conflicts cut across and involve both urban and rural areas, and influence political attitudes toward economic policies, global trade, and spatial planning. In explaining political support, especially at the regional or municipality level in Nepal for neoliberal or open market economic policies, but it brought the significant impact of caste based politics and the political leaders contend with caste allies, competition with caste rivals, political rivalry in maintaining electoral dominance and the need to sustain political power to maintain social and economic dominance at various levels of sociality and spatiality. It is also to be noted that cities play a crucial role in mainstream national or regional political contestations and negotiations for diverse sorts of groups such as class-based, ethnic, caste, religion or region, ideological, and political groups and factions.

### **City as an Organized Space with the Connective Problem**

Such studies have, however, concentrated on a few narrowly defined problems such as regional (under)development or regional imbalances, adducing resource constraints, climate/weather, infrastructure, and demographic factors in their arguments and explanations. Significant early work in the immediate aftermath of independence notwithstanding, the role of class relations, emergence of entrepreneurial classes, intra- and inter-class conflicts, issues of power, governance, and devolution, rates of primitive accumulation, and trajectories of domestic capital flows-these rarely find mention in analysis of regional patterns of economic growth and change. This has meant that issues of regionalism and regional conflicts are also not located in their proper social, economic, and political contexts; the regional dimensions of urban politics and spatialized conflicts are not comprehended; and the politico-economic dimensions of state capture and governmentality involving specifically delineated regional groups are not recognized. This is despite the very obvious boundedness of classes, as well as caste and other identity-based groups, and the new regional linkages formed by the movement and spatial spread of sociality and power of these groups.

Postmodern critiques of Western-style democracy and governance institutions have not been taken seriously, in part owing to the absence of a sound empirical basis for such critiques. The evolving social and power structures in Nepal, its transforming demography, and collision,

cooperation, and competition between sections of domestic and foreign capital all affect political alignments and activity in cities and at regional levels in diverse ways.

## **Regional Disparities between Rural and Urban Areas and Migration Trend**

The foregoing description reinforces academic work that analyzes population movements in terms of their significance for power relations and power structures. Unlike critiques of neoliberalism, which maintain the global flows of capital and their implications to the relative neglect of domestic forces, the perspective outlined here enables us to develop a multipronged approach for better appreciating class, capital, and politics, and their spatial manifestations and implications in Asian contexts.

Migration from the Hill, Himaliayan and inner Terai region of the state, with which the city is contiguous, has been more problematic. Such types of migrants constitute a significant force in capital city's middle class, its jargon workforce, and in terms of political influence. Democracy substantially reduced their political power in the regions in which they were a minority. The movement for the different regions like Hill and Terai after 1990s has been significant for the formation of linguistic states in Nepal that can be shown in the points by following.

### **As a demographic and factors based migration (pull and push)**

- ❖ Internal migration (Hill vs. Terai)
- ❖ Heterogeneous demographic situation

### **Cooperation and Solidarity among Nepalese citizen**

- ❖ Socio-Cultural unity
- ❖ Religious solidarity
- ❖ Caste and Ethnic diversity

### **Political Instability and Social Disintegration**

- ❖ State Restructuring process
- ❖ Identity based Movements
- ❖ Fear of Social Disintegration

## **Challenges and Opportunities for Nepal**

With the population exceeding 28 million and ever-present low economic growth rates, Nepal faces a number of challenges in its attempt to achieve prosperity and higher living standards for its citizens. Dual economic system, political instability and confusion, economy's increasing dependence on remittance incomes, low investment rates and investment unfriendly environment, closure of major industries, energy crisis are some of the major obstacles in the road of Nepal's economic growth. Presence of unions and syndicates in almost every sector of the economy and domination of economic activities by a few large business houses present additional major obstacles to growth and implementation of a growth friendly economic model. Lack of equal liberalization among the different sectors of the economy has undermined the benefits of the liberalization measures taken by the government in early 1990s.

Yet, Nepal also has numerous opportunities especially with its abundant natural resources and potential for hydro power, tourism industry and inexpensive human resources. Its geographic position as a "transit economy" between India and China, two of the fastest growing and most populous economies in the world provides Nepal with immense opportunities if it can utilize them. As India and China are growing at extremely high rates and have been forecasted to grow at the similar rates for an extended period of time, even the spillover effects from these countries could create thousands of jobs for Nepalese citizens and encourage growth in Nepal. Besides this, with the newly created affluence the number of Chinese and Indian tourists visiting foreign countries is also increasing rapidly. Nepal could have its tourism industry boosted by bringing in these tourists. Nepal is also among the few LDCs who are members of World Trade Organization. Being a LDC member, Nepal has a substantial advantage in the agriculture sector. Huge domestic and export subsidies in the developed countries have distorted international trade in agriculture. Nepalese exports of agriculture products are concentrated in few products and also in few countries. Nepal could also benefit from numerous opportunities brought about by globalization. With the rapid spread of globalization and decrease in communication and transportation costs, labor intensive as well as IT related jobs are being transferred to developing and least developed countries. India's IT revolution is one of such examples.

## **Conclusion**

This abstract tries to assume that certain preconditions are necessary for cities or regions to show their new identities and to be allowed to enter global circuits and benefit in diverse ways from integration. In the Nepali context, while inter-urban competition is no doubt present, a long-term view of the growth or decline of the economic role of cities indicates the key function that classes with a specific interest in urban areas perform. While Kathmandu (capital city of Nepal) has been linked to global financial and trading circuits for a much longer time compared to Biratnagar and Birgunj (the largest cities) recent entrepreneurialism in urban governance also has to be explained in terms of classes which stand to benefit from global integration and so have an interest in urban governance reforms. That was the past and even recent condition but recently Nepal has gone to the federal way so it is still unclear to say the proper economic and regional urban-rural relationship. However, different cities are growing rapidly in Nepal with the support of international airport, tourism development, and decentralization practices of Nepali government. Now federal model also will support to grow regional identities and it will be the main factor to make an identity between rural-urban regions.

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