Chapter 2

The Nature of the State, Leadership and Governance

To reflect on the nature of the state, the composition of its leadership and the pattern of governance are necessary in understanding the question of human security in Nepal. Because the state is not only the referent for security in military terms, it is also a facilitator of social opportunities to the people living in it. Even when market opportunities are regulated by and dependent on state policies and decisions, despite the claims of a borderless world, both the institutional and functional dimensions of the state are of relevance in determining the state of human security/insecurity in any country.

The question of human security in Nepal is often poised against the backdrop of poverty. The perennial problems of poverty coupled with unmitigated population growth have been described as the twin factors constraining human development and the national economy, thus, expanding social deprivation and increasing human insecurity. The implied meaning of such a statement is that it is not the public policy of the state/government but the population explosion that has caused poverty, deprivation and destitution in the country. The state of human security/insecurity, therefore, is overwhelmingly conditioned more by the persistence of poverty than by the state policy of poverty alleviation; in other words, the failure of people-centric development practices. The arguments about “failed development” are posited against the reality of “illiterate and politically unaware masses” (Panday, 1999) by the leadership whose role model, indeed, has become that of the local “lords of poverty” (Hancock, 1989) for dependent development. This perspective has to be examined and explored under the broad rubric of the polity and leadership in Nepal. Although the formation of the Nepali state in 1769 after the conquest of the Kathmandu Valley by a Gorkha King is important in situating political
development, cognisance of the leadership's role and the control of political power that has created either the condition of social opportunity or of denial in the mechanics of state-society relationships and the prospect for human security or insecurity is particularly important in locating the process of economic development and in assessing people-relevant policies in the post-1950 period.

I have taken leadership as a central phenomenon in understanding the process of governance because leadership—both in its legitimate and illegitimate forms—is the ultimate arbitrator in the use of the power resources of the state. However leadership seen as an authority legitimised through popular will and performance is only a recent practice in Nepal; the country has long been ruled by monarchs of autocratic political dispensations who have continued to cast their shadows over the process of governance. The structure of leadership, its role in the process of governance, and its impact on society can therefore help us evolve a generic perspective on the state of human security/insecurity in Nepal.

2.1 A HISTORICAL NARRATIVE OF STATE, LEADERSHIP AND SOCIETY

The question of leadership was only of residual interests to most people prior to 1950. The people of Nepal were ruled under a monarchical system with the hereditary leadership of the king, specifically the Rana dynasty. The Monarchy was the fountainhead of sovereign power and had unquestionable authority. Thus monarchy as a tradition has been long embedded in the political psyche of the people; the history of Nepal is mostly linked to the illustrious role of the monarchy which is symbolised as the saviour, unifier, and force of integration in the country. Monarchy has been cast in different roles at different times since the Shah dynasty ruled the country first after the military conquest of the Kathmandu Valley in 1769. Monarchy, thus, has evolved as a crucial institution controlling territory and administering state. Politics in Nepal, despite its vicissitudes, has naturally converged around the institution of monarchy. Therefore, leadership has been seen as a continuation of the ancestral authority vested in the monarchy. Political leadership in this sense has simply become a phenomenon linked with the sovereign. The monarchy has been presented as the political institution from which the power of the state-executive, legislative or judicial emanates.
The Monarchy has, thus, been held in high esteem by some as the saviour in a “situation in which even God might fail” in preserving the national identity (Sharma, 1989:365). Monarchy, in fact, has been identified with Nepali nationalism. Thus, for some, monarchy is an inalienable form of the state: “Remove monarchy and there is no state, and minus the state there is no nationalism” (Sharma, 1997:482). Monarchy has thus been equated with the state and of a Nepali nationalism conjoined with the survival of the state. The political history of Nepal consists of absolute monarchs and oligarchs encouraging patrimonial and patronising systems for whom the administration and control of the territory through demonstration of unflinching loyalties to the “governing elites” are the predominant concern. This tradition, exclusively authoritarian, has helped elite formation in the country. These “ruling elites” mostly consisted of military personnel and courtiers related to the Royal/Prime Ministerial Palaces before the democratic interregnum of 1951. Thus a sizable number of influentials have shaped the course of Nepali history. The elitist tendency remains, although the short-lived public leadership that emerged in the aftermath of the democratic upheavals of 1951 was revolutionary as well as of a transformatory nature. Thus the history of politics in Nepal has mostly been a history of elites irrespective of the political system. The elites have been instrumental in determining the political orientation of the system.

This systemic facet has continued to influence the composition of political parties; elites have been monopolising the apex of power both within the party and the government. Most political parties in Nepal jockeying for power have been composed of aspiring elites who have the single objective of pursuing state power. This elitist tendency has long been based on a deliberate policy of social exclusion particularly in the spheres of participation and representation. Moreover, the national elite network structure has been influenced by the personal connections of the people in the Royal court as well as their appointees in the different sections of the national administration.

The group that forms the national elite structure therefore is homogeneous and share common experiences and values as well as a similar social background. The social homogeneity, value consensus, and personal connections based on interpersonal relationships have helped evolve a cohesive elite community. The function of the national elites in such a situation is to form a unitary structure with the help of centralisation of power. This unified approach to autocratic rule has
negated any prospect of diversified approaches to government. As one observer of power politics and elite cohesion notes:

The conception of power elite and of its unity rests upon the corresponding developments and coincidence of interests among economic, political and military organisations. It also rests upon the similarity of origins and outlooks, and the social and personal intermingling of the top circles from each of these dominant hierarchies (Mills, 2000:292).

The political history of Nepal is characterised by all these features. The dominant group still remains the people who had organised themselves in the campaigns for “national unification” and formation of the Nepali State. This suggests an intricate relationship between the political leadership and state formation. As H.D. Lasswell had observed: “the political elite comprises the power holders of a body politic. The power holders include the leadership and the social formation from which leaders typically come, and to which accountability is maintained, during a given period” (cited in Bottomore, 1971:13). According to the Nepali anthropologist Bista, the collectivism of power elites “manifests in a particular social institution of much importance known as afno manchhe (one’s own people). Afno manchhe has the potential of being used as a natural form of social organisation within Nepal, but it can also be readily subverted to negative ends” (Bista, 1991:4). He further observes:

Nepali mind is very clearly structured into several types of divisions. This structure automatically leads into a very well organised hierarchy too. The distinction between the ingroup of “us” and the rest of the outsiders as “they” manifests in every walk of social, cultural and economic life. Everything inside the circle of “us” is predictable and manipulable…. So there is a constant need to maintain the line of that circle. There is no security without the existence of this circle. The persistent of ethnic or regional identity in addition to the social or ritual hierarchy is a manifestation of a need to have one's own circle defined clearly and maintained permanently…. [F]ew persons will discard one's own interest in a secure circle in favour of a larger national interest wherein individual interests are not served. People will be willing to discard their traditional circles and identify with a new one, which promises to be more rewarding than the old (Bista, 1989:178).

This sums up well the extent of the social relationships maintained through caste and kinship ties. Most important has been the afno manchhe circle primarily built on caste and kinship relations. It has become a critical Nepali institution integrally connected to the smooth functioning of society (Bista, 1991:98). Any break of this relationship would be an open invitation to insecurity. Not being afno manchhe is
therefore tantamount to being a non-entity who in the absence of any reference becomes a non-person. Although there are certain exceptions, the existing practice of favouritism and corruption in politics, bureaucracy and business, shows the extent of domination through kinship ties (Bista, 1989:178). Harka Gurung’s deliberation on Nepali society sums up the exclusivist position of the dominant caste group and the consequent denial of voices from below. The voice of the marginals can, ironically, be heard only outside their country (Gurung, 1997: 496). Indeed, discrimination was so prevalent that until 1951 the Tarai people were not permitted to enter Kathmandu valley except for the period of Maha Shivratri mela, the festival of worshipping the supreme Hindu God Mahadeva at Pashupati Nath temple. Although the Taraians were High Caste Hindus, the Hill High Caste Hindus dominating and controlling the state treated them as aliens. Their women even required rahadani (travel document) to move inside the country. It is not enough, therefore, to be a Nepali. As Welpton argues, “Being Nepali, then, means different things to different Nepalis and we need to be constantly aware of the gap that may exist between official aspirations and actual feelings of a population divided along ethnic, caste, and class lines” (Welpton, 1997:39). Put simply, the process of nation building in Nepal remains incomplete despite official claims that national integration is a driving force behind the Shah dynasty’s national unification project.

Actually, the history of Nepal has been entirely one of “Bir Gatha” (the brave deeds) of the rulers. Though there are numerous important studies done by both Nepali and foreign scholars on the country’s political history, these mostly concern the rise and fall of the kings and prime ministers (Adhikari, 1980:70). Political leadership is also defined on the basis of struggles, sacrifices and internment undergone by the person in the course of oppositional politics. Therefore the tradition of “hero worship” has continued to colour a person’s identification with leadership in the country. Rose and Fisher’s (1970) study on leadership and politics as well as the study on Nepali elites done by Shaha, (1982) are studies focussed on the role of the monarchy as principal and dominant phenomenon. Baral (1977), on the other hand, has treated the subject of leadership focusing on the oppositional role of political parties. The patriarchal values of traditional Nepali society, some suggest, has continued to influence the core of the leadership of current political parties. Patrimonial and paternalistic values have characterised
the leadership structure of the political parties as is evident by the predominance of males (86%) in the bicameral legislature in the first parliament (1991-94), a majority of them belonging to high caste Hindu religious stock and rural background. Economically, they have been of middle class background, although they belong to the higher economic categories. A majority of legislatures were of the Brahmin caste in both Houses of the Parliament in 1991-94 and 1994-99 (Chalise, 1995; Meyer and Chalise, 1999). In the post-1999 electoral politics, the representation of Brahmins in the national policymaking bodies have actually increased rather (see Table 2.4).

Ethnic imbalance is a crucial finding of another study that suggests 55 percent of the local leadership is composed of people with elite family backgrounds and the domination of the male in the leadership structure. Accordingly, “this figure corresponds to national leadership position in caste/ethnic terms. Domination of high hill caste groups in composition of political leadership at national and local levels reflects their pre-eminence in social, economic, administrative and political structures of the country.” The politics of personality and patronage is deeply embedded in the formation of the power elites of the country despite indications of the weakening of the traditional elite’s hold on the national polity in the 1999 General Elections (Baral, Hachhethu and Sharma, 2001: 85, 128-31). Although Dahal is of the view that the governing elite caste groups of highborn Hindus (Brahmin, Chhetri and Newar) are gradually breaking down, he agrees with the argument that political elites have consolidated their status through educational achievement, family background and political connections (Dahal, 2000:130). These remain the most sensitive criteria comprising social opportunity.

Some other studies have reflected the dominant tendency of politico-administrative power to concentrate in the hands of a minority comprising high caste people since 1769 (NSAC, 1998; Gurung, 1998). Their predominance in the national decision-making apparatuses—both in civil and military services—has helped to determine the nature of evolution of Nepal as a unitary and centralised state. It can therefore be argued that the leadership structure in Nepal is more or less composed of people with similar social and religious backgrounds who have been monopolising the power of the state for two centuries now. Their high social status origins along with traditional bonds formed on the basis of interpersonal relationships as well as records of their political careers to some extent have cushioned their ability to lead.
Thus, the issue of leadership in Nepali politics, as well as the problems that flow from it, has taxed the wits of Nepali scholars, in particular the ones who care to examine the impact of this phenomenon. This is so because of the leadership inabilities both in its traditional and modern forms.

The problem of leadership, therefore, has continued to cause perennial political instability as an impact of which the social and economic spheres of the country have been severely jeopardised. Though there is growing anxiety about the challenges the Nepali state face, there is apparently no one ready to rescue the state from its debilitating situation. The state is in crisis but the leadership has proven its “inability to change a direction (or rather a slide) to catastrophe” (Blaikie et al., 1980). The trouble with Nepal is simply and squarely a failure of leadership to rise to the occasion. The problem with the country can be summed up as the leadership’s infirmity, unaccountability and irresponsibility and its unwillingness to take up the task the leaders have been bestowed with by the electorate. The conclusion therefore is that the leaders’ unmistakable compromise of governance in the context of their pursuit for power and privileges has had devastating impact on the nation and has increased miseries of its people.

2.2 STRUCTURAL INCONGRUITY AND NETWORKING OF POLITICAL ELITES

Understanding the leadership phenomenon and its impact on human security in Nepal requires comprehending the political character of the Nepali state. It would be necessary to do so within the context of the formation of the Nepali state, the traditions it has continued to uphold, and the values it cherishes. The political character of the Nepali state is determined by its origins. The role of the state and Nepali political values has developed over time and the result has been the development of a composite political culture that has consistent and continuing impact in democratic leadership. Before discussing the data obtained through review and research, an overview of three critical facets of the burgeoning reality of Nepal, namely the nature of the state, the networking structure of Nepali elite and the function of leadership should be made. The interrelationships between the state and regime will be explored in order to establish the pedigree of the leadership and its impact on human security concerns.
An anecdote can sum up the character, the tradition and the values governing the Nepali state in the contemporary era. When asked by a news magazine, how he situates himself within the state milieu and his people and his role as a monarch, the late King Birendra had reiterated the standard divine theory of monarchy declaring that his people accept him as a God, and his feelings did not enter into the matter. He also declares that the “monarch and his subjects have been governed by dharma, a system drawn from the Hindu religion.... The king cannot change this value system. Therefore, he too [was] governed by the ethical code (as defined by the Hindu religion). According to this ethical code, the king lives and has his being only to protect the people, to dispense justice to them and punish the wrongdoers. Indeed, the king embodies the collective identity of the people, and as desired by his people it is he who grants and amends the constitution” (Newsweek, 10 September 1973). Through this view, King Birendra clearly articulated the position of the monarchy on the question of the ultimate source of political authority in Nepal, asserting that his government and people are governed under the constitution of the country. King Gyanendra, who ascended to the throne in June 2001 after the palace massacre, interpreted his role in a similar vein when asked: “What’s like being a living God?” To this question posed by Time magazine, the king replied, “We were given the personification of Vishnu and Vishnu is the preserver of all things. And I’m glad that my role—the role I have to play—has been spelled out like that, just as it is in the constitution” (Time Online, 26 January 2004).

Monarchy thus has been traditionally dispensed to play a leadership role in a Hindu polity. This role has its basis in organising the Nepali state as the “Asli Hindustan” by the first Shah King in his Dibya Upadesh (divine instruction) to his successors and followers (Stiller, 1968). The context in which the term “Asli Hindustan” emerged in the political vocabulary of the king was the geopolitics of the time of the rise of King Prithvi Narayan Shah. North (Tibet) was ruled by the theocratic religious sect. The South (India), which was termed as Muglan, was breaking up under the Mughal emperors with the ascendancy of the British East India Company. Thus by identifying the country as the real Hindustan, the rulers in Nepal had asserted their religious independence by asserting the non-Muslim identity of the state.

Despite this fact, in organising the state, the Dibya Upadesh appeared to have been apparently influenced by the Mughal Directives
of Ain-I-Akbari that had been key in forming a patrimonial bureaucratic Mughal empire in India. The Ain-I-Akbari views the emperor as a divinely-aided patriarch, the Royal household as the central element in government, members of the army as dependent on the emperor, the administration as a loosely structured group of men controlled by the imperial household, and travel as a significant part of imperial activities. The Ain-I-Akbari is also a reflective version of the Weberian conception of the patrimonial bureaucratic state in which emperors require employees regular attendance in court, establish overlapping spheres of authority, transfer officials frequently, use intelligence gatherings methods and travelling—known as Daudaha. King Gyanendra thus undertook the daudaha of different parts of the country since he ascended to the throne in 2001 and particularly after the coup.

Prithvi Narayan Shah conceived the state as resting on two pillars: a contented peasantry and a loyal army. In the first case, his instruction was not to overburden the agrarian economy of the country by overtaxing peasants. He was not in favour of state intervention in the simple life of the peasantry and for avoiding disturbances in the territories annexed. In the second case, in recognition of the presence of land-hungry soldiers from the rugged hills, the Dibya Upadesh says that the soldiers should be provided with adequate tax-exempted land so that they would be able to fight without anxiety for the welfare of their families. In exchange, he demanded absolute loyalty (Stiller, 1968:65). Perhaps because of this reason, some scholars are of the view that the Gorkhali expansion undertaken by Prithvi Narayan Shah was influenced by the “land-military complex” (Stiller, 1975:277-294) of the people living in the rugged hills than their zeal for national unification.

Accordingly, the basic motivation for the conquest was land: “the limit of the army [was] the land; the limit of the land [was] the army.” There was a symbiotic relationship between territorial expansion and military growth (Stiller, 1975:285). Military growth was not possible without the conquest and appropriation of land because the cost of retaining the armed forces could not be met without Birta and Jagirs based on confiscation and distributing land to safeguard the religion of the Hindus (Regmi, 1975:105). That is to say, the motive of the Gorkhali elites was basically to control state power and to use their service to the state as a stepping-stone to enhance their economic security and affluence. As Regmi suggests, the “relative poverty of the king and the political leaders of the hill state of Gorkha, who took recourse to
territorial expansion and the building up of an empire as a means to improve their economic condition” was the primary cause behind the formation of the Nepali state (Regmi, 1995:63). Thus, Burghart concludes that the state of Nepal was considered primarily a possession of the Gorkhali kings who asserted their sovereignty by exercising proprietary and ritual authority (Burghart, 1984:103). The hill elites were proud of identifying themselves as Gorkhalis rather than Nepalis. Their perception of ruling over Nepal was even reflected in the national anthem played until late 1960s: “May we Gorkhalis always maintain the Lord’s command over Nepal.” Gender insensitivity was another feature of the national anthem as can be seen from the use of the word ‘Bhai’ (brother) and the line that read ‘Hami Nepali Bhai sarale’ (all the Nepali brothers), though this line that was later removed to make it gender-inclusive.

In organising the principles and function of the government, the Dibya Upadesh states the life of the court officials should be simple “with rewards for the superior works given in terms of honour rather than wealth.” The king had also issued instructions to confine sensitive state duties to the family of a trusted few alternating the official duties between and among the Pandes, Basnyat, Panthas, Thakuris and some Magar families (Stiller, 1968:61-62). The policy led to the centralisation of national power in the hands of the few, helping to consolidate Nepal as a unitary state. Similarly, the national flag inherited from the Vedic tradition reflects the continuity of Aryan culture in the life of the people patterned to accentuate the influence of a Hindu religious ethos that latter led to the evolution of Nepal as a Hindu state. The expansion of territorial control by the petty-state of Gorkha justified the ruler’s legitimacy and the tradition that the ruler observed in administrating the state by keeping power close to his chest (by making power privy to a chosen few) thus giving birth to the Bhardars or so-called nobility (bearers of the state’s responsibility) who acted as feudal lords of the state and a social class onto themselves (Bloch, 1971).

Four key ideas are behind the constitutive principles of the Nepali state that emerge in the era following the conquest of the Kathmandu valley in 1769. The first was the indispensable power and authority of monarchy that the Hindu king of Gorkha had established. Second was the supremacy of the Hindu ethos in national life. Third, the Hindu social system based on caste division was promoted for social integration. And lastly, the Khas language—later to be known as
Nepali—spoken by the king and his courtier—was recognised as the lingua franca (e.g., Sharma, 1992:7; Burghart, 1984). State building thus becomes a process in which the rulers, through combination of the powers of coercion, manipulation and co-option, imposed their cultural and moral values on the population found within its boundaries (e.g. Bendix, 1964; Connor, 1972; Gaige, 1975). Nepal is solely identified with the Hill and Hinduised culture fostered by the rulers and the people of other distinct cultural and linguistic groups are forced or cajoled to adapt to the dominant culture identified with the state and celebrated by the monarchy.

Since the organising principles of the state was firmly rooted in the person of the monarch, concentration of power on him as the sovereign entity was exclusive to the realm of an unitary state. The essential quality of a unitary state is the exclusiveness of its territorial claim, although the exercise of power within its borders may be limited in the name of “participation” or “devolution” or tradition of local autonomy. The monarchy as symbolising the state presumes that allegiance can only be directed towards the institution of the central, national government; there can be only one king. Local variations can be retained as exceptional and diversity in life style can be allowed only if its ultimate form can be determined by officials holding power in the centralised national government. King Mahendra’s decree characterising the parliamentary system of government in 1960 as an alien and intrusive form of governance was made on the basis of the traditional political cultural experience of the people who see the monarchy as the embodiment of national sovereignty. The functionaries of the panchayat system he had introduced replacing the parliamentary democracy was thus provided only with advisory roles responsible to the central authority in the governance of the country.

The essence of the unitary state is that there is actually nothing that can be called local; local politics, in fact, becomes a reflecting of national politics and issues are mainly developed and formed on the basis of national issues. The unitary state system therefore has conditioned the context of the development of leadership in Nepal heavily. As the bastion of power is the centre, the leadership at all levels invariably gravitates towards the central power milieu than to local arenas. Another feature that the centralised power structure has encouraged is that leadership has simply become a question of social status, which alone glorifies power, privilege and purse. This context
therefore has led to the development of a social structure supplementing the constituting principles of the state through caste hierarchy permitting inclusion on the one hand and exclusion as well as the marginalisation of people from the matrix of the state power on the other.

2.3 SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND STATE-SOCIETY RELATIONS
The social structure developed on the basis of the Hindu scripture Manusmriti which influenced the cultural practices of the people and empowered the state to promote social exclusion. According to this Hindu text, the people in Nepal were divided into four broad hierarchical categories: Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Sudra. The first two categories of the people constituted the ruling class. As the social hierarchy was constructed in that shape, the majority of the people living in Nepal were relegated to the status of caste people. Evidently, even the Newars (or the vanquished people) had no place either in the civil or military service till 1804. But the sheer ignorance of the Gorkhali rulers about the revenue administration of the conquered Kathmandu valley, and in conduct of foreign affairs with the knowledge of Persian, Urdu as well as Tibetan/Chinese language compelled them to employ some Newars in the lower rung of civil service. In the social hierarchy formed under the Shah rulers, Newars as the vanquished-class people were treated as “enslavable” along with other ethnic people. As the Newars were urbanites and their superiority in knowledge of statecraft compared with the ruling class of the period was obvious, the then rulers were forced to “upgrade” Newars to the level of “un-enslavable” in 1863, exactly nine years after the implementation of the national legal code by the Rana Prime Minister Jang Bahadur Kunwar Rana to form the social hierarchy of Nepal (Malla, 1992).

Qualifying this hierarchical mode and social stratification was the adoption of the Muluki Ain (National Law) in 1854, which further refined the caste system. This national code classifies the people living in Nepal into different castes by making them Tagadhari (wearers of the sacred thread) and non-Tagadhari, touchable and untouchable, enslavable and un-enslavable, and by institutionalising the social injustice. The state officially protected caste as an institution and promoted its observation by nurturing customised laws in accordance with Hindu ethics. In constructing the state’s self-image, following Prithvi Narayan Shah’s “Asli Hindustan” dictum, Jang Bahadur thus
inseminated the religious consciousness in the national body politic to assert as well as preserve state authority. Religion and rituals prohibited the inclusion of those in the state apparatuses considered impure, lowly and untouchables. This led to the deliberate adoption of a policy of social exclusion.

Caste, therefore, has become an exclusionary social institution, forcing those considered low caste and outcaste to live a life on the margin. Ultimately, the caste system has become a process of social exclusion because of which participation is restricted and social opportunities denied to many. In other words, political power in the country is privy to the people belonging exclusively to the high caste group. Bista (1991:36) thus has observed, “Historically, it appears that the caste system has its greatest success when called upon to help establish the legitimacy of a particular regime.” The caste system concocted by Hinduism therefore becomes the source of the legitimisation of authority and Hukumi Shashan (rule by peremptory command) the law. Relations between the centre and periphery were maintained by forging a vertical coalition of interests among power aspirants as a consequence of which power elites were formed, in the course of territorial expansion and consolidation by both the de facto and de jure rulers.

Through the process of co-option, the rulers at the centre retained the influence of the same forces at the local levels while consolidating their own authority with measures like marriages, rewards and the establishment of social relations. The social networking established by the high caste people and members of the abolished Royal families (except the Malla rulers of the Kathmandu valley) remain potent enough to determine and shape the political course of the areas they inhabited either through their becoming the local leaders of the political parties that were to emerge later or Royal nominees during the course of Nepali history. The relationships between the ex-Royals and their loyals allies have woven a strong social fabric, which has shaped the dominant political ethos of the country. One of the reasons behind the persistence of such a situation in the country is the preponderance of a system of patronage flowing from the central authority that has continued to influence the local political dispensations as well as the electoral process even under democratic Nepal in the post-1990 period.

Political choice under democracy, that is to say, selecting a leader during the ticket distribution for elections has increasingly been based on the basis of a person’s loyalty to the central leader, in this case the
leader of the central committee of any political party. Political parties, by necessity or choice, have in effect worked as an organisation for the regrouping of the traditional forces. The same group have used political parties as a path to prestige and wealth. Cementing this hierarchical mode of relationship is the cakari system based on sycophancy as a social value that has continued to encourage corruption and misuse of state funds by afno manchhe with elementary ethics falling prey to the vices of politically influential high-caste people.

2.4 POLITICAL PARTIES, POLITICAL POWER AND THE LEADERSHIP

Till the dawn of the short-lived democracy of 1951, the structure of the Nepali state was top-heavy, either with the influence of the monarchy or the Rana oligarchy. In either system the political power was authoritarian in nature. As Adhikari notes: “For the common illiterate mass, however, there was nothing to choose between absolute rule by the Shah dynasty or by the Rana family. Under either system the people in general were considered no more than Raitis and Prajas (tenants and subjects), who had duties to perform but no rights to enjoy” (Adhikari, 1984:50). This subject—master relationship between the rulers and the ruled is vividly expressed by the use of the phrase “Thatched Huts and Stucco Palaces” by an economic historian of Nepal to indicate the excessive exploitation of the peasantry in the country (Regmi, 1978). Structural incongruity therefore was a prima facie reason obstructing the emergence of a popular and public leadership and a welfare economy. As political power was founded on a non-democratic ethos either by the monarchy or a Rana oligarchy whose intent was excessive centralisation of state power, the people were made subservient to the interests of the ruling class. The emergence of popular leadership with the objective of revolutionising the society by breaking the traditional ethos of the centralised regime construct is a post-1950 phenomenon in Nepal. Political leadership and party politics, as we understand it, emerged in Nepal against the ethos of inherited or hereditary “leadership.”

Political parties, instituted as a legitimate organisation in the competitive political atmosphere of the post-Rana period after 1951, have been bastions of power for those who had organised themselves as a collective force under party flags. The first generation of leadership that emerged in the national scene to be cast in the revolutionary mould were inspired by the need to transform the political structure of
the country in favour of the popular will. The Nepali Congress was the political party that spearheaded the 1951-armed movement for democracy, its image was that of vehicle for social change through a declared policy of socialism. The concept of socialism as translated in the Nepali national context was related to the people and widespread poverty of an agrarian society. Land reform, therefore, was the priority programme of the Nepali Congress party which drew support from the masses and to enhance its popularity.

On the other hand, the Communist party of Nepal, which established its presence inside the country after 1951, presented itself as a pro-poor political party with some radical ideas about the eradication of poverty, and confiscation of land. It presented itself as a genuine revolutionary party working to establish a republican Nepali state. The third party that emerged after the demise of the Rana regime was the Gorkha Parishad, a pro-Rana party allegedly attempts to conserve traditional interests. These three different political parties, headed respectively by a Brahmin, a Newar and a Chhetri, had been moulded by the political socialisation their leaders during the anti-Rana movement. As the credit for the democratic orientation in Nepal largely goes to the Nepali Congress party, the rest of the political parties were psychologically alienated from the former. The Nepali Congress was nationally and internationally acknowledged as the champion of democracy. These competitive parties undermined each other’s positions in the free atmosphere of Nepali polity between 1951 and 1960 instead of trying to evolve a healthy political process through which their programmes in the country could be constructively implemented.

The democratic experiment of the 1950s, however, was short lived. When King Mahendra disbanded party politics and dismissed the elected parliament after the Royal coup of 15th December 1960 because of the excessive zeal of personalistic rule, he co-opted the challenges posed by the abolished Nepali Congress party through drawing support from members of defunct communist parties as well as reactionary forces opposed to that party and the government formed during the 1959-60 multiparty system. The handpicked panchayat elites who worked according to the directives of the king and the palace secretariat after 1960 (Shaha, 1982) and were more like bureaucrats rather than politicians even though the members of the unicameral Rastriya Panchayat (national legislature) were elected representatives of the people in the latter years of the erstwhile system.
Experience therefore suggests that the 30 years of panchayat system between 1960 and 1990 had created a leadership void in the public sphere as the authoritarian system under the monarchy discouraged the emergence of public leadership that could provide legitimate choice to the people. The active intention of the monarchy in the country’s affairs had edged both the prospect of participation and political socialisation by confining the national polity to the hands of same forces that had ruled the country prior to 1951. In identificatying the political elites fostered by the panchayat system, Rishikesh Shaha, has observed that there were just 18 hard-core political elites during the period that had enjoyed “more influence with the patrimonial leader [i.e. monarch] than anyone else.” In the first line of influential elites were not public personalities but members of the Royal household: the first and the most influential being the Queen herself followed by the Queen mother and the king’s brothers. Following them were the Chief of the Royal Households, the King’s Principal Military Secretary, Principal Secretary, Principal Personal Secretary, Principal Private Secretary, Principal Press Secretary and so on. The place of the elected prime minister in the hierarchy of elites was 14th while the Chief of the Army Staff was the 18th—the last in the rung. The members of the Royal family and its chosen few thus dominated the elite in this centralised power matrix. There was only one Brahmin, 4 Newars, 6 Thakuris belonging to the Royal family and 7 Chhetris constituting the power elite (Shaha, 1982:122-23). The combined strength of Thakuris and Chhetris, both belonging to the traditional warrior clan and therefore the only ones eligible to be rulers was in a majority.

Such a systemic control exercised by the monarchy during the panchayat period rendered all public exercises farcical, including the electoral process introduced after the third amendment to the Constitution in the aftermath of the national referendum of 1980. The monarch therefore was not only the undisputed leader of the country; monarchy reflected the power of the “personal rulership” of control and domination by denying a political role to others (Roth, 1968). There was no room for complacency during the panchayat period. The Panchayat system was comparable only to a totalitarianism regime existing under the façade of “democracy.” The type of political regime that panchayat system had built, according to Lok Raj Baral, had a “close parallel to the Spanish regime under Franco” (Baral, 1993:4). Between December 1960 and March 1990, the government was formed and reformed 39
times with constant Cabinet reshuffles and reappointments of the people to the posts of Vice-Chairperson, Chairperson, Prime Minister and Ministers of different rank and portfolios. But the top governmental position rotated among just six persons considered trustworthy and nonthreatening to the person of the king. Among them 2 were Brahmins, 2 Chhetris, 1 Newar and 1 Sanyasi. Table 2.1 is an indicator of persons from different ethnic/caste groups representing the ministerial berth during the panchayat period.

Table 2.1. Ethnic/Caste Composition of Cabinet During the Panchayat Era 1960-1990

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Brahmin</th>
<th>Chhetri/Thakuri</th>
<th>Newar</th>
<th>Hill Ethnic</th>
<th>Tarai Caste</th>
<th>Dalit</th>
<th>Muslim</th>
<th>Others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prime Minister</td>
<td>2+1*</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency Count of Ministerial Composition</td>
<td>60+1*</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cabinet Minister</td>
<td>20+1*</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Minister</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asst.Minister</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>112+15*</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Note: The figure given in the asterisk denotes Giri, persons converted to Sanyasi sect.

The overwhelming influence of the three caste groups in the composition of the cabinet during the panchayat system is not unique. What is, however, interesting to note is that during the period there was a dominance of Thakuris/Chhetris at all levels comprising the ministerial ranks. Presumably, this was because the monarchy had asserted the rights of the ruling class over others. On the whole and as the data in the table indicate, the most populous Tarai caste people along with Dalits and Muslims were neglected in the selection process by the king. Though Dalits and Muslims were frequently represented in the cabinet, particularly, in the mid-1970s, they were quite often given insignificant portfolios, except for one Muslim who was appointed to cabinet rank three times in the short span of the panchayat regime during its last days. This case requires to be further explicated: he was not intended to represent Muslim community but it was the personal loyalty of person to the monarchy that led to his representation in the
panchayat cabinet. King Gyanendra appointed the same person as Communication Minister in the government formed in June 2004, which he dissolved on 1st February 2005.

2.5 PARTY POLITICS AND LEADERSHIP CHARACTERISTICS IN POST-JANA ANDOLAN NEPAL

Political parties are considered the apex of the leadership building apparatuses despite the variety of leadership struggling to emerge in the national context. A majority of political leaders in Nepal are products of the long struggle for democracy. Thus a person's record of suffering, struggle and sacrifice in the past has contributed to his/her emergence as a leader. The educated middle class and high caste groups (Brahmin and Chhetris) have traditionally dominated the composition of the political leadership. Political leadership has largely come from those people who have traditionally enjoyed power by virtue of their higher position in social setting because of their economic power, family and kinship ties, and social networking. Despite the burgeoning discourses on leadership in the post-1990 period, the data accumulated so far through different research projects and the observation of this researcher both at the central and local level leadership position confirm the conclusion that most of the political leaders constitute persons from the higher socio-economic strata.

In the Nepali case, as the social structure of the country is conservative rather than liberal, caste also plays a predominant role in leadership. This tendency is to be found in the organisational structure of all the prominent political parties whether in their disbanded or underground shapes during the panchayat period or in their emergence as legitimate groups in the aftermath of the successful Jana Andolan in 1990. The Hill high caste groups from the grass roots to the central levels, in fact, dominate political parties in Nepal. Most of the leaders working untiringly for the restoration of multiparty democracy are undoubtedly from the hill stock and few are from the Nepal Tarai. Among them those who are locally prominent have attracted considerable followings both during the period of their political oblivion as well as in the period of open politics.

In particular, the Nepali Congress party, as the oldest surviving party, has drawn its leadership from the same old stock of leadership who struggled for democracy in Nepal from the days of the inception of political party in 1947. B.P. Koirala, who died in the struggle for the restoration of democracy, had a chequered political career; he became
The first ever-elected prime minister and underwent long spells of incarceration. Some, like the late Ganesh Man Singh worked as a “Guardian angel” till his death in 1997; and others like Krishna P. Bhattarai and Girija P. Koirala tested their mettle in power politics by becoming both party president and prime minister of the country. They have continued to maintain their grips on party politics and have influenced the political course of the country. Though their leadership of the Nepali Congress party has been challenged by the “second generation” of party members, they have no doubt been retaining their presence in party affairs.

On the other hand, the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) is composed of a faction of the disgruntled group that broke away from its mother institution formed in 1949 by the late Puspa Lal Shrestha. It has its origin in an underground movement of the panchayat era. Therefore, its leadership and the way it was organised remained obscure till the success of the Jana Andolan in 1990. This party has been described as most secretive as the persons leading its activities are sometimes not even familiar with each other. However, this party, formed with the objective of establishing a republican system in the country through political violence, as revealed by a high level party cadre, is also paradoxically composed mostly of Brahmin caste people (Neupane, 2000:62). The party had its distinct identity formed under the influence of the Naxalite uprisings in the Cow-belt territories of India bordering Nepal in the early 1970s. In its earlier reincarnation as the “All Nepal Revolutionary Coordination Committee” in 1975, this Marxist-Leninist group unleashed a peasant uprising in eastern Nepal, particularly in Jhapa district, by beheading some eight landlords and confiscating their land. Indeed the “Coordination Committee” was the first Maoists group that adopted violence as a path to redirecting the political course of the country, and later developed into the full-fledged party known as the Communist Party of Nepal (Marxist-Leninist).

The merger of the Communist Party of Nepal (Marxist) with the former in January 1991 in the aftermath of the Jana Andolan make this party become a mainstream party and was named to Communist Party of Nepal-Unified Marxist-Leninist (CPN-UML) it succeeded in forming a minority government between 1994 and 1995, and a coalition government in 1997-1998 and remains a major opposition party in the national parliament with leadership role in a majority of District,
Municipalities and Village Development Committees formed after the Local Elections at 1997. Thus, although the Communist Party was established in 1949, the inception of the CPN-UML is of recent origin; it has baptised only after the Jana Andolan like the other political parties, including the Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP).

The Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) emerged in Nepali politics as an organisation composed of seasoned political cadres of the erstwhile panchayat system grouped under the leaderships of two former prime ministers who are also fortunate enough to hold the reins of power in post-Jana Andolan coalition governments. Despite its poor performance in the parliamentary elections, the RPP emerged as the third significant political party. This party is the beneficiary of 30 years of panchayat politics and has the support of local cadres and is considered the party of the rich and (in) famous. There are two other political parties—the Nepal Sadbhavana Party (NSP) and the Nepal Workers and Peasantes’ Party (NeWPP)—that have a presence in the parliament and have been influencing the power equation. Except the NSP, the high hill-caste people form all other political parties that have the definite orientation towards broader national issues. The NSP, however, is confined to problems related to the Nepal Tarai issues, which have long been neglected by the power elite composed of the high-caste people of the hills. The NeWPP is a more localised political party, and is a variant of the communist movement; it advocates the interests of the peasants and the working class. A Newar, long representing the voices of dissent, in favour of the peasants and labourers heads this party. Likewise, the NSP was headed by a high caste Rajput (Kshatriya) until the demise of its president Gajendra Narayan Singh in early 2002. Badri Prasad Mandal as its president currently heads a faction of this party.

The structure of the leadership of political parties is of crucial significance in understanding political parties and their policies towards governance. As noted, political wrangling and infightings have disrupted all party organisations. Factionalism and break-up of parties are the common features. The reconstitution of the Communist Party of Nepal (ML) as CPN (UML) on February 15, 2002 has led also to the reconstitution of its central committee and politburo members. The 43 members central committee of the CPN (UML) has been expanded to a 57 member central committee by accommodating 14 new members from the CPN (ML), including the induction of 3 more members to the standing Committee. The 11 member standing committee of the CPN
The Nature of the State, Leadership and Governance

The Unified Mahasabha (UML) has now been expanded to 14 members after the unification of the two parties and the addition of 11 alternate members (Kantipur, 16 February 2002). Two Brahmins and one Newar from the CPN (ML) have now been accommodated to the standing committee of the unified party. Likewise three Newars, two Brahmins, two hill ethnic caste people and one Tarai caste person have been incorporated in the central committee of the party. This shows that the CPN (UML), which already full of hill high-caste people, has further strengthened the position of the same group in the party hierarchy.

The statutory composition and structure of leadership at the top remains an influential factor in the political and organisational basis of the leadership at the lower rung of the political parties. In addition, the state bureaucracy that the ruling elites have developed to implement their policies has shaped the type of state-society relations needed to impart the state ideology at the grass roots. As the civil service of the country is always adapted to the power of the rulers at the centre, its officials have hardly functioned independently and adjusted their services to meet the local needs of the elite. Bureaucracy functions on the basis of prestige acquired through association rather than performance. As Borgstrom has observed, “They will not be able to function on the basis of independent of the web of personal relation that pervade Nepalese society” (Borgstrom, 1980:175).

In this context, an observation made by Neupane on how has the state been organised in the contemporary era is relevant here. His findings suggest the pervasive dominance of hill high caste people in each and every state apparatus. Whether in the constitutional bodies and commissions (Khas [Brahmins and Chhetris 56%], Newar 24%), or in ministries, cabinet secretariat, prime minister’s office, palace services as well as police and military services or chief district officers, they dominate the civil service. The Brahmins and Chhetris constitute 77.5% and the Newars 17.6% of the total in the services mentioned in the latter categories. Likewise, the Brahmins/Chhetris combined representation in the national legislature constituted in 1999 was 60% followed by 7.5% Newars. Even civil societies’ institutions are dominated by Brahmin/Chhetris (75.9%) and Newars (14.8%). By enumerating the integrated national index of governance, Neupane comes to the conclusion that the Brahmins/Chhetris constitute 66.5% and Newars 15.2% of professional occupations and their combined strength is 81.7 per cent (Neupane, 2000:66-82). There is, moreover,
continuity rather than a break with the past for the Rastriya Panchayat (the national assembly) was dominated by high caste Hindu groups constituting 76 per cent of a total of 501 nominated as well as elected members between 1963 and 1988 during the panchayat period (Bista, 1991:164fn).

The monopolistic pursuits to power and privileges mostly by the three high-castes Hindu groups have marginalised the other three main social groups by design. According to Gurung (2003:11), those who have been marginalised are the Janajati (ethnic) on the basis of culture, the Dalits (untouchables) on the basis of caste, and the Madhesi (Tarai people) on the basic of geography, although together then they form the majority of the Nepali population. The data on the bureaucracy suggest the increasing stranglehold of the high caste: 83.1 per cent of the gazetted posts of the civil service are filled with the Bahun-Chhetris in comparison to 3.4 per cent of ethnic officials. In 1983-84, there were 69.3 per cent high caste people in the gazetted ranks and 3.0 per cent ethnics, by 2000-01 this has increased to 87.0 per cent high caste and decreased to 0.5 per cent ethnics respectively (Gurung, 2003:17). The Table 2.2 is an indication of the persistent pattern of social exclusion practised by the state.

This situation determines the control of power at the central level and the composition of leadership at the local levels where people of the traditionally privileged class have retained their influence. There has, however, been a change in the attitude and perspective on leadership brought about by the development in the peoples’ consciousness as well as by indigenous social movements and democratic polity. We will turn to this aspect of development at the local level shortly and discuss the transformations in the local leadership structure. But, before that, an understanding of the way political parties are organised at the top will help explicate the situation at the bottom. The Tables 2.3 to 2.6 highlight the composition of the three most significant political parties that have their bases at the grass roots levels as exemplified by the 1992 and 1997 local elections, and the ethnic/ caste representation of these parties in the national legislatures.

The total given above does not include the 6 other persons nominated later by the party president of the NC as well as the current figure of the CPN (UML) members after the unification of CPN (ML) with the former on 15 February 2002. The RPP has again split up after
### Table 2.2: Integrated National Index of Governance based on Social Groups 1999

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institutions</th>
<th>Dominant Group</th>
<th>Marginalised Group</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B+C+T Newar</td>
<td>Madhesi Janajati</td>
<td>Dalit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judiciary</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constitutional Bodies</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cabinet</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliament (both Houses)</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Administration</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Leadership</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DDC/VDC/Municipalities</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industry and Commerce</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Leadership</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural/Professional</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science/Technology</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil Society</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1,011</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>66.5%</td>
<td>15.2%</td>
<td>11.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differences %</td>
<td>31.6%</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>30.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Note: B+C+T = Brahmin, Chhetri and Thakuri.

### Table 2.3: Ethnic/Caste Composition of Parties’ Central Committee as of 2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>NC Number</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>UML Number</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>RPP Number</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Total Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hill Caste Group</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Brahim</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>58.1</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>71.4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>50.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Chhetari</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>27.5</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newar</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hill Ethnic Group</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>27.9</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tarai Caste/ Tribe Group</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Baral, Hachhethu and Sharma, 2001:47.
the formation of *Rastriya Janashakti* Party by its founder leader Surya Bahadur Thapa in early 2005. The 11th General Convention of the NC on 1st September 2005 elected 18 members to the new Central Committee (CC) along with the party president. The incumbent party president Girija P. Koirala won with ease for the third term receiving 86.53 per cent of the total votes (1,404) cast. Four new faces appear in the CC of which three are Brahmins and one, significantly, from the Dalit group—the first ever-elected member from this group in the CC of the party’s six decade old history. The new faces include two women. In total, of the 19 members elected CC constitutes 11 (57.89%) Brahmins, 3 (15.78%) Chhetris, 2 (10.52%) Janajatis, 2 (10.52%) Taraian, and 1 Dalit (5.26%). Five elected members are from the Koirala family and the rest are staunch supporters of the Koirala faction who did not question the candidacy of Koirala for the third term as the party’s president, something the prevailing party constitution does not validate. Koirala, as the president for the third term, constitutionally retains the rights to nominate the rest of the 18 members of the CC, which naturally will cater to his preferences as in the past. Thus the balance of the party’s power rests with Koirala as the patriarch, despite his failings.

**Table 2.4: Caste/Ethnic Composition of Members of the House of Representatives (HOR)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hill Caste Group</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brahmin</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>39.0</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chhetri</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newar</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6.81</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hill Ethnic Group</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>12.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tarai Group</strong></td>
<td>41</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>205</td>
<td>99.41(100)</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The constitutive principles of the state and the regime therefore condition the leadership of the country. A study of party building and the leadership of the Nepali Congress and CPN (UML), suggests that 50 per cent of the NC grass roots leaders (VDCs and Municipalities) are
Table 2.5: High Caste Group in the House of Representatives (HOR)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years of Elections</th>
<th>High Caste Groups</th>
<th>Representation</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1991 HOR</td>
<td>Brahmin, Chhetri,</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>62.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994 HOR</td>
<td>Newar Combine</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>69.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999 HOR</td>
<td></td>
<td>143</td>
<td>69.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Calculated on the basis of Table 2.4.

Table 2.6: Caste and Ethnic Composition of Nepal’s Legislature (in Percentage)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Proportion of population</th>
<th>Democracy (1950s)</th>
<th>Panchayat era</th>
<th>Democracy (1990s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brahmins</td>
<td>12.9 (12.7)</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chhetri</td>
<td>16.1 (15.8)</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newar</td>
<td>5.6 (5.6)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hill ethnic groups</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tarai group</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Note: The figures in parenthesis of the three High caste groups are derived from 2001 census data, CBS 2002.

composed of high hill caste people (Brahmin, Chhetri and Newar). This figure for the CPN (UML) is 56 per cent. The representation of hill ethnic groups in the NC at the grass roots level is 18 to 21 per cent, followed by 22 per cent of the Tarai community, and 6 per cent of the low caste and untouchables. The district level representation, however, favours the hill high caste group, which increased by 10 percent in comparison with the VDCs and Municipalities, reaching 60 percent. Brahmins have a lead figure in both organisational and elected fronts at the district level. The figures for low caste/untouchables’ representation declined to 4 per cent at the district level. The comparable figure for central level representation is over 70 per cent hill high caste people dominating the leadership composition of which Brahmins alone enjoy the most influential position. Accordingly, people of elite family background dominate the NC central committee (Hachhethu, 2002).
In case of the CPN (UML), a majority, or between 77 and 85 per cent leaders at the grass roots are of middle-class origins. The poor has substantial representation, constituting 13 to 20 per cent in comparison with the rich who make for 1 to 3 percent representation. The representation of the hill ethnic group is 17 to 27 per cent, followed by 8 to 12 per cent for the Tarai Madhesi community and 9 to 14 per cent for low caste/untouchables in CPN (UML) at the grass roots. As the NC, the hill high caste representation of the CPN (UML) increased at the district level. At the district leadership profile, Brahmins become net gainers and Chhetris loosers since their ratio decreased from 20 to 29 per cent at the VDCs/Municipalities level to 10 to 15 per cent at the district level. Similarly, the situation of low caste/untouchables did not improve. Rather, their representation fell at the district level leadership composition of the CPN (UML) and has become negligible. The central level leadership of the CPN (UML) has a predominance of Brahmins, constituting 60 to 67 per cent of the total, followed by 6 to 7 per cent Chhetris, 6 per cent hill ethnic group and 7 to 8 per cent Tarai community. The representation of the low caste/untouchables at the central committee of the party remains nil till date (Hachhethu, 2002).

The profile of the party and its leadership therefore is of high significance in understanding the current trends of local leadership in Nepal and their role in governance. The chief characteristics of the local leadership need to be explored to understand why has this occurred and why there is continuity in such a trend. Hachhethu (2002) has elucidated trends in the party as well as leadership formations which are discussed below.

One profound characteristic of the party leadership—both at the top as well as at the grass roots—is of a long term association of persons or cadres with the party if they are to be eligible for the leadership position. Thus party activists, as stated in the constitutions of both the Nepali Congress (NC) and the CPN (UML), are in a position to be recognised and recruited by the party hierarchy as leaders at the grassroots levels. The data Hachhethu (2002) obtained in general show that 59 per cent of the persons elected to the Village Development Committees (VDCs) and 80 per cent of the Town (municipality) committees' members have been associated with the NC for a long time. At the district level, over 71 to 85 per cent of the political activists began their career as NC, although only 53 per cent of the district leaders have continued their association with the party. Party veterans
constitute the central level leadership of the NC. The old guards were dominant in the central committee of the NC; in fact 38 per cent were founder members who retained 62 per cent of central committee positions. These veterans monopolised decision-making, influencing intra-party relationships with the support of members who had rendered outstanding service to the party between 1960 and 1990, the years the party was in the wilderness.

The CPN (UML), however, presents a contrary picture. As an underground political party, only a sizable number of people were involved in party activities (11 to 28 percent) before 1990. 71 per cent of the people who had joined the party after 1990 were recruited as grass roots leaders. At the district level, communist cadres who started their political career in the 1970s and 1980s constitute over 93 per cent of the leadership. The CPN (UML) has been successful in attracting people defecting from numerous other communist splinter groups. However, by occupying around 60 per cent of the district level leadership seats, the Marxist-Leninists have dominated the composition of the hierarchy. But the central committee of the CPN (UML) remained firmly in control of the post-1960 group who emerged as a consequence of the Jhapali movement during the panchayat era, although they were not known in the Nepali political landscape. After the amalgamation of the party in the shape of the CPN (UML), some old guards of the Marxist school of the post-1949 generation were provided with important portfolios in the party hierarchy which now is comprised of 13 to 17 per cent of such people. But these people were actually included in the central committee to make the party acceptable to the general masses.

The RPP constitutes the “liberal” faction of the erstwhile panchayat polity and is unrivalled by any legitimate political competition. The organisational basis of this party remains the old panchayat cadres, at the village, town and district levels. However, the political competition it has faced in the post-1990 Nepal led to a majority of the erstwhile panchas joining the Nepali Congress party in a manner has opened the flood gates for its membership since it is the only mass party. The NSP’s organisational basis remains the Nepal Tarai; correspondingly the Madhesi community is led by a person who has defected from the NC to form a party to voice the long festering problems facing the region. The NeWPP also falls in the same category, despite its encompassing political rhetoric claiming it to be the party of the farmers and labourers.
In addition to the continued association with the party on the basis of the ideological commitment of the persons, another characteristic of the leadership found at all levels is that it belongs to people of middle and lower-middle class background as well as high caste groups. Particularly at the local level, there is the absence of both rich and poor socio-economic background people in leadership (Baral, Hachhethu and Sharma, 2001). The third characteristic of the leadership is the factor associated with the personality of the person and the record of his/her past political activities. “For the people, leaders are those who are committed to ideology and goals and have the history of struggle and sacrifice along with clean personality” (Baral, Hachhethu and Sharma, 2001). This common perception on leadership is generally supported by the practice of choosing a person in contesting both parliamentary and local elections in 1991 and 1992 respectively when long association with the party as well as political sufferings (incarceration) were considered the two essential ingredients to be a leader. In other hand, the honesty and commitment of a person are reasons to make him a leader. The need for anyone qualifying as a leader in all the layers of the party politics, however, is to hold on to values that have been gradually eroding lately.

2.6 COMPOSITION OF LOCAL LEADERSHIP

Some eighty six per cent of the people live in politically demarcated 3,913 village development committees that have tightly knitted kinship relationships in some 36,000 to 40,000-village wards. Despite local variants, the social structure of the majority of villages is shaped by a Hindu ethos that has helped the formation of rural societies throughout the country on the basis of an integrative relationship between land and labour. The interrelationships between land and labour are two crucial parameters that can help understand the situation in village Nepal. The lands possessed as Birta by influential political, military and administrative personnel or elites or Jimmawals, Subbas, Jamindars or Talukdars and Jagirdars are tenured to the peasantry in the village.

This creates a unique pattern of social interaction designed to serve a patron—client relationship. Such a practice, in turn, can be important for understanding the political formation of the rural periphery and its relationships with the urban centres. The Nepali villages are
segregated by caste, religion and cultural practices in which a person is identified according to his/her social relationships and status. The Hindu religious ethos privileges people of the highborn caste groups. Thus, in most cases, a distinct phenomenon emerges in village Nepal where there is the intermingling of a privileged landowner class with the peasantry. As disclosed recently by the prevalent *Kamaiya* system in some regions of southwestern Nepal, peasants have even worked as bonded labourers for land-owning classes by mortgaging themselves for life from generation to generation. Although the *Kamaiya* system (Bandhuwa majdoor) was abolished by the Nepali Congress government in July 2000 by an annulment of their debts to the landlords, the plights of *Kamaiyas* have not been resolved, as landlessness, unemployment and lack of shelter have forced many of them to return to their old masters. The emancipation of the *Kamaiyas* was incomplete since the state had not taken responsibility for their safety and survival. Though the state has initiated the programme for rehabilitation of the *Kamaiyas* through distribution of land, their situation remains far from being satisfactory.

In some cases, as in the mid-hill regions, the *kipat* system on land has long determined socio-political relations between the community people based on the relations to land and labour. The *kipat* system in eastern Nepal was essentially a form of communal land tenure system affirming to the rights of the members of certain ethnic groups known as *Kirata* (Rai and Limbus). With the abolition of this system in 1971, the social relationship held together by the *kipat* system disintegrated, even though the land holdings retained the statutory status of the persons in local villages (Caplan, 1970). As Caplan has noted: “the loss of *kipat* is not simply a material loss.... With its abolition, the Limbus were denied a part of their past and so, inevitably, of their sense of the continuity in the present.” The Kipat system was a means of giving the feeling of belonging together for the people of eastern Nepal. The soil was seen to be sacred, rooting the community with a distinct identity. The transformation of their land into a commodity by the government severed their relationships with the land and the loss of their self-identity was a cause enough for alienating these people and ethnicising politics in Nepal.

While exploring the type of person who have emerged as a leader at the local level, it will be advantageous to review certain historical trends on account of the social conditioning of the Nepali village to distinguish between the similarities and differences between local and
central leadership. A majority of the central leadership in the national legislatures—both at the House of Representatives and National Assembly—are drawn overwhelmingly from rural Nepal. This constitutes about 66 percent of the 265 legislators and people of the high hill Brahmins and Chhetris caste groups. A majority of the legislators are with middle class economic status. Caste, occupation and economic status also, therefore, play a pivotal role in local leadership formation. In actuality, a Nepali village is composed of “several patrilineages or unilateral descent groups in the male line which typically cluster together in a given section, neighbourhood or locality of the ward”—the smallest unit of the electorate system. The kinship ties of the people living in such a given ward structure the pattern of relationships between the distinct kin groups by identifying themselves with a distinct locality (Okada, 1976). Such a locality is identified as a Newar Gaon, Bahun Danda, Khadkathok, Sarki Gaon or Kami Gaon in general. The social and ethnic segregation of villages inhabited by different caste people is also a common phenomenon all over the country. However, the seniormost person of a village becomes the headman and not only presides over kinship relationships but also manages to settle disputes through consultation with the people. As the relationships are based on patrilineal descent, despite legal provisions, women are mostly discouraged from participating in public affairs. As a result, very few women are elected as leaders at the grass roots level even though women constitute a half of the total population of the country.

Current leadership in Nepal has its origin in such ancient form. In eastern, western and Tarai Nepal, rich farmers were at the top hierarchy of the village panchayats during the panchayat regime irrespective of their caste. For example, in the Harpatgunj-Prasauni village panchayat of Parsa district both pradhan pancha and up-pradhan pancha were of the “Ahir” caste group (Yadav, 1987:195), essentially rich farmers. This was not a socially induced change but a consequence of the land-labour relationship. Similarly, the leadership and landholding were closely linked in eastern Nepal, a situation which changed with the abolition of the kipat system along with change made in central government policies. This provided impetus for some to grab land from their traditional occupants. The change in the land-tax system as well as the abolition of the kipat system particularly affected the transformation of the traditional leadership structure from the Limbu community to the Brahmin community who benefited from the change in government
policies (Caplan, 1970). Land holding has great impact in making a person a leader, as was the case in the Belaspur village panchayat in mid-western Nepal, where high caste persons with abundant land holding and wealth clearly emerged as leaders of the village and district panchayat. But for low caste and untouchable people, even if these people are economically well off in the area, their chances to emerge as leaders in the hill Nepal remain slim (Caplan, 1975).

There are some similarities in the leadership structure of central and local levels. The leadership at the local level is usually characterised by high caste domination. Secondly, as the national bureaucracy is guided by contemporary governmental policies the people in the proximity of the government become the real beneficiaries of the political system. Thirdly, those people who are closest to the locus of power remain distinctively in an advantageous position to be recruited or nominated for the leadership in a competitive environment (Caplan, 1975:155-56).

The local leadership during the panchayat regime was developed, first, through the networking of the Back to Village National Campaign (BVNC) and, second through the Panchayat Policy and Investigation Committee (PPIC) that created a homogeneous group to support the monarchical regime. The political regime that took the form of bureaucratic-authoritarianism had equated bureaucratic supremacy with political expediency in guiding the social, economic and political destiny of the nation. The zonal commissioners appointed directly by the king and the chief district officers appointed by the Home Ministry thus constituted the governing elites and were powerful enough to control and direct panchayat politics. A person intending to be nominated or selected as a politician/leader needed their clearance. The members of the BVNC or PPIC supervised political activities of the panchayat cadres and on the basis of the statutory power of these officials' recommendations political decisions were made that ultimately affected the organisation of the local leadership. In such a controlled political system, leadership was rather shaped than developed spontaneously since the power to choose was made to yield coercion and compliance to the system. Thus as the central thrust of the panchayat regime was selective rather than elective, it become a force of integration of people similar in socio-economic and political attitudes.

In the competitive environment of the party system leader-led relations have been carved on the basis of the would-be or incumbent
leader’s relationships at the local level with a particular leader of the party’s power hierarchy. For example, it is not enough for a Congressman to be a dedicated cadre to become a leader. He/she should have the support of the party’s high officials to be recognised, nominated or elected as a leader at the local level. This reality of party networking cannot be ignored in understanding the features of local leadership in Nepal. The need of formal and informal networking has been an important factor in developing converging interests and in influencing the overall pattern of relations to frame the structure of central and local leadership. Emphasis on human relationships developed through association, trust and loyalty, consensus in outlook and support, and social homogeneity qualify a person to climb up the leadership ladder.

A few examples will illuminate the leadership positions in some districts in which formal and informal networking between the top party leader and political workers shape local power structure. In Morang district, the kinship relationship established by the Koirala family influenced the local political setup by filling the ranks and file of the party’s local leadership organisations with members and relations of the Koirala clan. In another instance, the case of the dismissal of the Kathmandu as well as the Bhaktapur district leaderships of the NC by the party’s central committee in the year 2000 and its replacement with supporters of the Koirala faction in the party hierarchy supports the contention that local leaders emerge on the basis of formal and informal networking than recognition of the the leadership potential of a person. Since the inheritance of the legacy of certain political families is widespread in the country, so the majority of local leaders are from the families of these political activists.

Looking at the development of local leadership from the behavioural perspective, it would be interesting to know to what extent the local leadership has been used as a pawn in the jockeying of power amongst top party leaders rather than for entrenching the ideals of the party at the grass roots level. There are instances of the central leadership treating the grass roots leaders and their needs with disdain. The case of Bhairahawa municipality (Rupendehi district), based on a field survey carried out for this study, suggests that wards inhabited and led by the hill ethnic people are given more resources in comparison to wards inhabited and led by the Tarai people or the Madhesi. Political bias in fund allocation and the preference of a particular party in power at the
centre are critical ingredients in the development of local leadership as well as electoral politics. As constituency development becomes a *prima facie* commitment that a local leader/politician makes to get elected, there is a need of commonality in approach between the central and local leadership to attract funds and assistance, in the absence of which a leader fails to deliver and is discriminated upon. As a recent report suggests, only 11 out of 75 districts in Nepal have revenue surpluses that can let them sustain the administrative burden of governance as well as development activities on their own (Gurung, 2002:38-41). Financial sustainability is the precondition for decentralisation and empowerment of the local bodies, which cannot be attained with meagre resources (Koirala, 2004:13-21). There is also a need to overcome the bureaucratic maze created by the Chief District Officer, District Development Committee, and the Local Development Officer for obtaining funds and development assistance locally. Thus a leader can impart governance not on account of his efficiency, ability and honesty but because of his political connections to channelise resources and to sustain the locally prioritised programmes.

Kinship and ethnic relations are therefore crucial factors in the local leadership. Evidently, in the elections to the local bodies in 1997, most political parties successfully exploited the growing trend towards ethnic assertion. Samples from the Kathmandu district evidence such a tendency among political parties to field a majority of Newar candidates, particular that of the Maharjan caste group (the downtrodden) by the CPN (UML), as well as the low caste/untouchables because they constitute the vote bank. But the case of Jhapa district—southeastern Nepal—is quite different from that of Kathmandu. The political parties in ticket distribution for elections here mostly ignored the people of Tamang and Rajbansi ethnicity. The latter example endorses the feeling that kinship relations and ethnic affinity influence leadership selection in local elections. Baral, Hachhethu and Sharma (2001) found that kinship relations and family connection have been a determining factor in the emergence of local leaders. Of the 100 local leaders interviewed, nearly 50 percent said that their family connections with either district or central level leaders had contributed to their present positions. 60 percent of the leaders constituting the NC and the RPP thrive on kinship or family relations. Representative figures for CPN (UML) local leaders with family credentials are 39 percent. Another study of five districts (Dhankuta, Rautahat, Kaski, Dang and Baitadi)
with the sample of 500 respondents indicate that though the people
give the highest preference (65.6 per cent) to the popularity of a person
to be a leader of their constituency, 60 per cent of leaders thrive by
creating a vertical nexus with the central leadership.

Nevertheless, the local leaders are also becoming increasingly
aware of the fact that they cannot be at the top even in the VDCs/ Municipalities or districts without securing the support of the people. In
the context of the breakdown of party discipline and a growing
tendency towards contesting elections by rebel leaders of the same
party, it is becoming increasingly difficult for party candidates to secure
the political berth of leadership. Next, the popular feeling is that
leaders must be chosen to deliver local needs. The performances of the
leadership so far have not become a critical factor in leadership choice.
But the failure of the leadership to perform and deliver is more and
more a matter of concern. Failing to promote the greater well-being of
the masses is one of the true hallmarks of leadership, will definitely
cause the loss of followers since they will be unable to appreciate and
support the objectives of the leader and to work with the status quoits
leadership. Thus leadership and governance are two faces of the same
coin. Leadership without governance could create a political void
leading to social disruption and chaos. One of the priority functions of
any leadership is therefore to manage the organisational impetus for
change and development.

Again, the challenges to the leadership at the local level in particular
have been compounded by the Maoists' insurgency spreading in rural
Nepal. This extremist movement, considered as extra-constitutional,
and terrorist activities have capitalised on the failure of governance by
the political leadership under democracy. The spread of the Maoists
insurgency in the villages of Nepal has been largely considered as a
consequence of the failure of political leadership at the local level in
relations to the problems of dominance, exploitation and poverty. The
dominance of high caste people in the leadership hierarchy, sluggish
village economies and the poverty of the rural people in general have
stagnated development aspirations, generating political dissent.
Failures of both central and local institutions have led to a pathetic
situation. However, the termination of the tenure of local government
since July 2002 has created a leadership void at the local level which is
being exploited by the Maoists. The central authority's decision on non-
extension of the tenure of the local bodies ended the representation of
2.14 million local leaders of whom 40,533 were women. And with the mounting challenges of the Maoists, a majority of local leaders belonging to different political parties have left their homes and constituencies out of a concern about security. Instead of the presence of the legitimate authority of the government, villages of Nepal today are governed by the Maoists’ “People’s Government” and their dictates causing mass exodus of the people from their domiciles.

2.7 STATE, LEADERSHIP AND THE CONTEXT OF HUMAN SECURITY

Ever since their inception, political parties in Nepal have not only struggled to achieve democratisation against authoritarian regimes, they have also justified their struggle for democracy as a means for the development of the country and the well-being of the people. The political leadership has tied the democratic problematique to the development problematique of the country, as the concept of development entered the political vocabulary of the country only in the mid-twentieth century, the first democratic experiment being carried out in 1951. The First Five Year Plan (1956-60) adopted a framework of community development focusing on the agrarian economy with rural development and infrastructure building as twin priorities of the government. The state of development has, however, remained pathetic even after the completion of the 9th Five Year Plan and in the midst of the 10th Five Year Plan (2002-07) that has concentrated on the challenges of poverty alleviation (NPC, 2003). In between, the leadership thrust for economic development has led to the dependency on foreign aid and increase in foreign debts from around 2 per cent of GDP in 1975 to 56 per cent in 1996 (NSAC, 1998:16) and over 70 per cent in 2003.

The excessive centralisation of power by the leadership with the formation of a patriarchal and patrimonial nexus for dominance not governance has led the state to a terminal point, recovery from which now requires a performing and not a domineering leadership. The practice of monopolistic control by the leadership should be replaced with a pluralist approach. The people of Nepal have been exploited for economic and political control and their hunger and helplessness have been profitably used by leaders to ensure their dominance. But this can no more be seen a good policy even by the leaders with the emergence of a violent contending force in the form of the Maoists. The Maoists insurgency is simply the result of the leaderships’ long indifference towards the sufferance of the people and of hopes deferred. The people
are still suspended between hope and despair as they hunger for the leadership to come up with the ideas and visions that will ensure the sanctity of human life and humanitarian progress. This vision can change the political history of Nepal marred by frustrations and failures into a state of equal citizenship and partnership owned by the people. Glaring disparities and policies of social segregation against women, dalits and janajatis have led to a restive but critical mass, not only creating challenges to governance but also making the status of human security far from being desirable in the country.

Reform of the leadership—both at the political and societal levels—should be the priority agenda for the human security architecture of the country. As noted, the Nepali leadership is overwhelmingly male dominated both at national and local level despite the fact that the Nepali society is composed of 51 per cent females. The state’s gender bias and the behavioural pursuit of the state and leadership is confined to empowering an already powerful and dominant group what is needed is to take decisions on positive discrimination and reservation policies for promoting progress and encouraging participation of women in governance. Historically, the Nepali women were in the forefront of war waged by the enemies in the past; they have been in fact fighting shoulder to shoulder with men in every political movement; they have contributed equally to bringing political change in Nepal. Perhaps by making the Constitution gender-neutral the country has recognised the contribution of women to Nepali history. But the same constitution and laws made following this gesture has been noted as biased against women.

It has been pointed out in a study that existing laws have 118 provisions and 67 schedules, spread in 54 different laws, including the constitution, that are discriminatory against women (FWLD, 2000). Both in the Gender-sensitive development index (life expectancy, educational attainment and income) and Gender empowerment measure (political participation, administrative and professional services) the status of women are highly uneven and discriminatory (e.g. NSAC, 1998:44-51). Although the government has undertaken several initiatives under domestic legislations to promote substantive equality between men and women, these have hardly made any difference in bringing attitudinal changes in societal relationships. Social practices are the real cause of the vulnerabilities and miseries of women. The traditional practice that has become dharma for a woman even in the household is to go hungry
when feeding children, husband or elders. Traditional rituals are so hypocritical that though the Hindus worship females as virgin goddesses—Nepal has a living kumari goddess—and Laxmi (the goddess of wealth), Saraswoti (the goddess of enlightenment and knowledge), Durga (the goddess of power), they brutalise their women at home. No law against domestic violence and the inhuman treatment of women exists as was freshly evident in the case of an Associate Editor of the government owned newspaper *Gorkhapatra*, Radha P. Joshi whose brutality against his newly-wed wife was publicly condemned in August 2004. Women’s contribution to the national economy does not figure in the national accounting system; they are not in the national-decision making systems and few of them are to be found in the political parties’ central hierarchies; they are hardly permitted to vote independent of the choices of their male folks. The Table 2.7 is an indicator of the situation of women and their position in the national life in Nepal.

**Table 2.7: Positional Sketch of Women in Nepal (in Percentage).**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Population</td>
<td>49.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Life Expectancy</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>53.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy</td>
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<td>37.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister</td>
<td>97.06</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representation in Lower House</td>
<td>94.15</td>
<td>5.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representation in Upper House</td>
<td>85.0</td>
<td>15.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil Service</td>
<td>92.2</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judiciary</td>
<td>97.92</td>
<td>2.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal Professional</td>
<td>94.03</td>
<td>5.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chief District Officer</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Royal Nepal Ambassador</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media and Communication Sector</td>
<td>88.0</td>
<td>12.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>86.3</td>
<td>13.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land Ownership</td>
<td>95.6</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


According to the data recorded by the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare, there were 8,800 (8.55 per cent) women working in various capacities in the government in 2001 out of a total of 93,716
civil servants. There were just 26 (4.02 per cent) women serving in the gazetted class 1st and special class ranks out of 647 officers in these ranks. By mid-2001 when the only woman serving in the special class rank from the ministry retired, there was no representation of women in the highest decision making bracket of the civil service. The statistics suggest that a majority of women employed by the government are in the health sector but very few are in parliamentary service. The health sector comprises 48.9 per cent of the total women is work force in the government while officials employed in the parliamentary sector constitute 0.6 per cent of the total (Dhital, 2001). Though the government is the largest employer till date, it has given little preference to women’s recruitment. Although it has raised the women’s service entry age to 40 years in the civil service and also opened women’s recruitment in the combat service of the Royal Nepal Army recently, few women are actually recruited. For example, out of 1,272 women candidates for the Gazetted 3rd class posts only five women were appointed by the government. The army presently has 300 women soldiers in combat service some of whom are widows of the armed personnel killed by Maoists during skirmishes.

The mentality of a weaker sex that requires protection, care and control prevails in Nepali society, particularly among Hindus. The attitude in Hindu society remains that of the Manusmriti which says: “Women should be under the strict control and supervision of their fathers until marriage, under the control of the husband after marriage, and that of a son after the death of the husband” (cited in Bista, 1991:63). Domestic violence against women is considered natural. Even the national justice system is biased against women, as 70 per cent of judges interviewed in the course of a study do not reportedly accept that women have the right to their own body (Himalayan Times, 25 November 2002). Insidious crimes against women like trafficking are overlooked, notwithstanding the stringent laws that have been enacted to prevent human traffickings (NHRC, 2003:69-80). Gender discrimination, like others, is pervasive as determined by Hindu ethical codes, which will not go unless attitudes change, legal protections notwithstanding. Special measures taken for the upliftment of women through enactment of laws and regulations and even through the Eleventh Amendment of the National Legal Code 1963 by the parliament in 2002 have not changed the situation as several discriminatory laws still exist “creating further disparities and widened the gender gap” (FWLD, 2003:99).
The problems with Dalits and Janajatis (indigenous people) are not dissimilar. They are as marginalised as women from the social mainstream. Dalits are not only considered poor and oppressed, they are also considered untouchable and thus social outcastes. Although the National Legal Code of Nepal in 1963 abolished caste-based untouchability, it is widespread in practice not only between non-Dalits and Dalits but also between Dalits, since they have their own hierarchy. Some studies have revealed that there are at least 205 different forms of caste-based untouchability practised in Nepal as Dalits are marginalised in every conceivable field due to discriminatory practices (Bhattachan et al., 2001; Dahal et al., 2002). Empowerment of the oppressed has never been a policy of the government. Although Dalits constitute about 14 per cent of the total population, they have not even had a single representation in the 205-member parliament in the past 12 years of electoral practices under democracy between 1990 and 2002. The closure of the social space to Dalits has resulted in their destitution as most of them are forced to live in abject poverty, illiteracy and menial occupation unable to sustain them adequately.

Dalit movements and advocacy groups, however, have been handicapped by their own discriminatory attitudes towards each other. Almost all Dalit organisations are composed of hill groups, none of which is sensitive to the causes of the Madeshi Dalits of the Tarai regions. There is a clear geographical divide even in the Dalit organisations and hill Dalits dominate the National Dalit Commission formed in 2002. This is indication of the sense of the ‘otherness’ towards Tarai Dalits, and the barrier between the Hill and Tarai is yet to be dismantled. The plights of the Dalits are rhetorically articulated in the corridors of policymaking and there is talk about ending untouchability and related discriminations, broadening representation in government through 5 per cent reservation, providing them ownership of land and resources by including them into national welfare schemes. Action Plans have been made for the upliftment of Dalits (Dabal et al., 2002). Yet humanising Dalits in the Nepali society is far from reality, and their miseries and insecurities remain.

Although the Janajatis (indigenous nationalities) combined form a majority of the population in Nepal, their representation in the national mainstream is also low as reflected in Table 2.2. Of the 59 indigenous nationalities some like the Raute are nomadic and Chepangs, Kusunda
and Bankarias still live in jungles that are being encroached upon. As a consequence, they are facing extinction. The imposition of Hindu religious dogma and anti-secularist ideologies has been vigorously opposed by the Janajatis. Their demands for protection and promotion of the indigenous cultural and customary rights ending exclusion have yet to be heeded (Bhattachan, 1995; Yakha Rai, 1996; Gurung, 2003). The reality of cultural marginalisation has led to the insecurity among the indigenous people, forcing them to regroup in different ethnic outfits such as Khambuwan and Limbuwan Mukti Morchas, for example, preparing for ethnic turmoil in the country. The Maoists have been able to exploit the persistent ethnic grievances through formation of several alliances outfits, evident in the Madeshi Mukti Morcha’s coordination of the Maoists movements in the Nepal Tarai regions. The common plank between the Maoists and several ethnic organisations, including the Jana Mukti Morcha, remains the declaration of Nepal as a secular state along with local autonomy and federalism. The suppression of the rights by the state has added to further insecurities of the people and the convulsive effects of the insurgency has led the state to a poverty trap. But sadly, the leadership is harvesting the conflict.

References


Newsweek, 10 September 1973.


