

Cultural Crisis of Caste Renouncer: A Study of Dasnami Sanyasi Identity in Nepal

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Abstract

Jat NasodhanuJogikois a famous mocking proverb to denote the caste status of Sanyasi because the renouncer has given up traditional caste rituals set by socio-cultural institutions. In other cultural terms, being Sanyasi means having dissociation himself/herself with whatever caste career or caste-based social rank one might imagine. To explore the philosophical foundation of Sanyasi, they sacrificed caste rituals and fire (symbol of power, desire, and creation). By the virtues of sacrifice, Sanyasi set images of universalism, higher than caste order, and otherworldly being. Therefore, one should not ask the renouncer caste identity. Traditionally, Sanyasi lived in Akhada or Matha, and leadership, including ownership of the Matha transformed from Guru to Chela. On the contrary, DasnamiMahanta started marital and private life, which is paradoxical to the philosophy of Sanyasi. Very few of them are living in Matha, but the ownership of the property of Matha transformed from father to son. The land and property of many Mathas transformed from religious Guthi to private property. In terms of cultural practices, DasnamiSanyasi adopted high caste culture and rituals in their everyday life. Old Muluki Ain 1854 ranked them under Tagadhari, although they did not assert twice-born caste in Nepal. Central Bureau of Statistics, including other government institutions of Nepal, listed Dasnami under the line of Chhetri and Thakuri. The main objective of the paper is to explore the transformation of Dasnami institutional characteristics and status from caste renunciation identity to caste rejoinder and from images of monasticism, celibacy, universalism, otherworldly orientation to marital, individualistic lay life. Both philosophical orientation and behaviors are transformed. Who are the Dasnami Sanyasi? Why did the Dasnami Sanyasis campaign for the identity? How has the Dasnami Sanyasi been changing? Based on key informant interviews, observations in different Dasnami Sanyasi communities, their historical institutions, and self-reflection as a member of Dasnami Sanyasi are methods of data collection.

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Keywords: *Dasnami Sanyasi*, caste identity, transformation, renunciation, culture

Introduction

First, I never thought that *Sanyasi* was a category out of the caste system because I was nurtured in my community as high caste Brahmin and Chhetri. When Brahmin friends in the village had done initiation ritual, I came to know that *Sanyasis* were out of the rings of high caste systems. Initiation and death rituals of the *Sanyasi*, and Brahmin-Chhetri were observable differences in the village. Some *Sanyasi* groups felt awkward caste status and they tried to equalize themselves as Chhetri. According to my father, some school-educated *Sanyasi* started to wear sacred threads without initiation during the *Panchayat* era and abandoned after the revival of democracy in 1990. Their logic of wearing holy threads was that anybody could identify their caste status when they moved out of the village. One of the sacred threads wearers told me that when he was out of district for higher education, the host family demanded his holy thread. He added that there were no hotels and lodges on foot trail from Pyuthan to Dang and Butawal. The traveler had to request nearby shelter the village in the evening. The host villagers doubted the caste/ethnic status of the guest because so-called untouchables were not allowed to enter their home. The easy way to identify caste status was checking the sacred thread of Aryan-looking guests. Ethnic communities, in many cases, were identified by their face, language, and dress. Aryan-looking people without sacred thread were doubted of being untouchables. One of the educated men about 73 years old told a story of behaving like untouchable and humiliated night when he traveled from Pyuthan to Butwal. The family and other villagers asked to show sacred threads, but he did not have it. He tried to convince them but he was failed. The host family did not allow him to enter their home. The host served food and straw-mat out of the door. He realized highest degree of humiliation. The next day, he left the host family early morning without saying goodbye. When he returned own village, he requested his Brahmin to make a set of holy threads for every year. He used to wear it when he traveled out of the town until 1990. After 1990, none of the *Sanyasis* wear sacred thread and initiation ritual in my village.

Second, I was called to participate in Nepal *Dasnami Sanyasi* particular program in 2011 at Baneshor-Kathmandu. The program was just before the National Population Census program. The objective of the Nepal *Dasnami* was to orient their own communities to record they were *Dasnami Sanyasi*. Rabindra P. Giri, the chairperson of the Nepal *Dasnami Sanyasi*, announced, "Do not hesitate to call yourselves *Dasnami*, do not tell enumerators that your caste is Chhetri." I asked that why the issue of writing *Dasnami* was important. He said to me that many of *Dasnami* recorded under the caste of Chhetri. He added that the *Dasnami* should come out of the category of Chhetri. He

indicated that both *Dasnami* and enumerators of survey were confused to put a given type of castes in the survey form. Some of the *Dasnamis* hesitate to name them *Sanyasi* instead they preferred Chhetri. For enumerators, some sure names were confusing, and they included that category into Chhetri caste. Rabindra's identity initiative boggled my mind to explore the historical categorization and treatment of *Dasnami* communities in Nepal.

Much has been written about *sanyasi* or *sanyasis* as ascetics, but little has been written about their transformation into a caste and politics of caste identity. In assessing the emergence of renunciatory ideologies and ways of life, scholars have been generally divided into two camps; some see it as a natural or, to use Heesterman's term, an orthogenetic development of the Vedic tradition (Heesterman, 1964), while others regard it as a new phenomenon that challenged and transformed the central premises of sacrificial theology of caste (Dumont, 1960, 1980). The etymological meaning of the *Sanyasi* who quit (*Teyag*) the social world (sacrificial theology) pursues Sanyas Ashram out of four Ashrams of the *Varnashram* system (four stages of life) of Hindu religious text (Clark, 2006). It was argued that the renouncer did not leave society, for he subsisted alms and preached to householders (Dumont, 1980; Clark, 2006). However, I am talking about *Gharbare Sanyasi*, who has been indulging in marital and family life as laypeople. I start some cases of transformation of property, and clan from Guru-Chela to father-son, and stories of *Dasnami Sanyasi's* caste characteristics. The *Dasnami Sanyasi* institutions were culturally created, and there was no biological-genealogical derivation of power and property of the institutions. They sacrificed marriage-family, clan, and personal property for the sake of Vedic intelligent life. On the contrary, *Dasnami Sanyasi Mathas* established for the institutional development of meditations, and religious purpose was privatized into the family property. They were communal property, and the state registered them under the *Guthi* land system. The classical tradition of meditation and sacrificial life was changed. The owner of such *Mathas* has a marital family and children. It was long ago they transformed from celibate *Sanyasi* to *Gharbare*. Their authority and ownership of *Mathas* handed down from father to sons. Recently *Gharbare Sanyasi* started collective initiatives of caste (sect) identity at local and national levels in Nepal. In the last section of the article, I analyzed their moves from non-caste to caste-like community with theories of cultural identity and Sanskritization (Srinivas, 1996). The interface between the caste system and Hinduism has for long been mediated by a process subsumed under the concept of Sanskritization by M.N. Srinivas. He defined the concept as:

...the process by which a low caste or tribe or other group takes over the customs, ritual, beliefs, ideology and style of life of a high and, in particular, a 'twice-born' caste.

The Sanskritization of a group has usually the effect of improving its position in the caste hierarchy (1996:77).

The concept of Sanskritization has been contested on empirical and theoretical grounds. Nevertheless, the general significance of the logic of Sanskritization as a cultural process for both the caste and Hindu groups can hardly be denied. Similarly, William Fisher (2001) and Arjun Guneratne (2002) argued that culture and identity are reproduced in the context of the social networks, families, and villages within which individuals are raised and reside. Moreover, they argued that traditional cultural raw materials of the group are purposefully used to create mass identity by the elites (Fisher, 2001; Guneratne, 2002). These theoretical concepts are helpful to analyze transformation of the *Dasnami Sanyasi* culture and identity.

Being a member of the *Sanyasi* family, I have peculiar personal experiences and socialization. A descriptive research design has been employed. This article is based on both primary information and a review of secondary documents. I have gone through published documents about the origin and transformations of *Dasnami Sanyasi* of South Asia. Key informant interviews*, transect walk, genealogical study, and observation methods were employed to collect information. I have participated series of annual conferences and meeting of the *Samaj*. Besides that, my socialization in Tushara-Pyuthan and occasional meetings with Nepal *Dasnami Samaj* are the primary sources of data, and books and academic articles are used as secondary sources. The main objective of the paper is to explore why and how *Dasnami* culture (renunciation, celibacy and collective property) and identity changed over time. Besides documentation of their cultural values, the paper tried to unravel formation of new caste: *Dasnami* in Nepal. The first part of the article deals with the origin and philosophical concept of *Dasnami Sanyasi*, and its legal status. The second part deals with the institutional development of Nepal *Dasnami Samaj*, and the last part is about local experiences of being *Sanyasi*.

Origin of *Dasnami Sanyasi*

The classical meaning of *Dasnami Sanyasi*, refers to someone who belongs or inters (a surname being bestowed by an initiating Guru) one of ten names[†] who abandons 'worldly life, lineage, and caste responsibility. The surnames of *Dasnami* indicates that they belonged to one of the ten ascetic orders (*Dasnami*) allegedly

* Executive bodies of Nepal *Dasnami Sanyasi*, District committee members, old people of *Dasnami* communities are selected as key informant because they have knowledge of classical *Dasnami* cultural history and some of them engaged on collective identity campaigns.

† The ten names are: Giri (hill), Puri (town), Bharati (learning), Ban (forest), Parbat (mountain), Aranya (wilderness), Sagar (ocean), Tirtha (pilgrimage place), Asram (hermitage), and Saraswati (knowledge).

instituted by Shankaracharya, at the same time, the title Gosain was mostly reserved for returnee into *Gharbare Sanyasi* or progenies of *Gharbare Dasnami Sanyasi* (Pinch, 2006, pp. 37). Being *Sanyasi* is a metamorphosis of a person from caste order to non-caste or above the caste principles. The surnames were bestowed based on their preference for dwelling. The *Sanyasi* was a religious identity and initiated into a parallel socio-cultural world with its hierarchy and behaviors. *Dasnami Sanyasi*, one of the largest renunciate sects in South Asia, had potential access to an extensive network of *Mathas* and Ashrams for their food and shelter.

According to religious philosophy, Aadi Sankaracharya* founded and organized *Dasnami-Sanyasi* to revive literary- religious campaigns against varieties of opponents, including sacrificial theology followed by householders Brahmin. Four very famous *Mathas* (known as Pithas) under the authority of four disciples, in the west, east, north, and south of India at, respectively: Dwaraka, in Gujrat; Jagannathpuri, in Orissa; Jyosimath, near Badrinath in Uttaranchal; and Kanchipuram in Tamilnadu, were established. It was believed that *Dasnami* order was the first Brahmanical order of ascetics founded by the Sankara. There were several comments and claims for and against the argument (Potter, 1981).

The Brahmanical tradition of the image of the individualized, male *Sanyasi* has been remarkably influential on a general understanding of the dynamics of *DasnamiSanyasi*. This image nevertheless detracts from the significance of *Gharbare Sanyasi*, who indulged personal property, family, and political campaigns within the framework of a caste/ethnic community. According to the *Dharmashastras* and *Sanyasa Upanisad* texts (Olivelle, 1992), renunciates maintain celibacy and undertake austerities of some kind or other to purify the mind and body, to ‘realize God’ or obtain liberation- in its ontological core. It was described that alone Brahmanical ascetic was wandering from one Brahman household to another.

Books on Vedanta published in India, there was a considerable likelihood of seeing a picture of one of the Sankaracharya portrayed as a living representative of the ancient Brahmanical practice of *Sanyasi* (Isayeva, 1993). The Sanskrit term *Sanyasa* originated as a specific reference to the ‘throwing down’ or abandoning of the ritual implements used by Brahmans for their daily Vedic ritual, the adoption of an ascetic way of life, and the renunciation of social obligations or ritual duties in pursuit of ‘Knowledge’. The term *Sanyasa* (‘renunciation’) rarely occurs in the Veda and Brahmanas, and only appears once in the classical *Upanisads*, in the *Mundaka Upanisad* (3.2.6: liberation through “sanyasa yoga”) (Clark, 2006: 4 Pp). From the

* This Sankara, (between 788 to 820 CE) is also referred to as Adi (original) Sankara, to distinguish him from subsequent Sankaracharyas.

perspective of Yogi, the key objective was the victory over death that was the essence of the universal definition of religion. All living creatures face the problem of death. Religion is to find a way through death, to cheat its temporal finality, and to conquer it thereby. Moreover, the pragmatic definition of *Sanyasi* is given by Bhagwan Byasa. He notes:

द्रव्यत्यागे तु कर्माणि भोगत्यागे व्रतानि च । संगत्यागे तु संन्यास सर्वत्यागे समापना ॥

Vedic Karmas aim at giving away one's possession (money), Bratas austerities aim at the abandonment of enjoyment, Sanyasa aims at giving up the two ties of man, 'I and mine'; the end is the abandonment of all that is not *Aatma*. The Karma theory aims at abandonment whose final aim is realization of *Aatma*. Vedas have sanctioned Sanyasa.

The Shankaracharyas identified themselves with ancient Vedic tradition and four-fold Varna- Ashram systems. The *Asrama* system became fully formulated within the Brahmanical tradition by around the beginning of the Common Era, only incorporating Sanyasa as the 'ideal' fourth Ashram in the final phase of its development (Olivelle 1978:28). The *Sanyasi* conceived in the stereotypical image of the lone Brahmanical renouncer is often supposed, in various ways, to represent an ancient 'individualistic' ascetic tradition receding into India's remote past. In terms of caste identity of ascetics *Sanyasi*, the novice was asked about previous caste status before renunciation. There was a Guru-Chela relation in Ashrams. Lower caste was traditionally not allowed to become *Sanyasi* (Hofer, 1979). Recently, many lower caste *BheshdariSanyasi* found in South Asia. Therefore, caste-based Ashrams and societies were formed among ascetics (Pinch, 2006).

Before talking about the identity and legal status of *DasnamiSanyasi* in Nepal as a renunciate sect, a primary concern is to tackle the prevalent notion of warrior ascetics who played significant roles against imperial rule in India. William R. Pinch (2006) analyzed the political and nationalist movement of ascetics of North India during colonialism. The epistemological challenges he posed were "godman" political indulgence against British and Muslim in the Indian nationalist movement. Colonial administrators also doubted on the purely religious status of the *Sanyasi* because they collectively lived in Ashrams with weapons. Pinch depicted:

The sadhus generally were seen as a potential source of criminal mischief by officials of the Raj is evident in the publication in 1913 of a police handbook in Urdu that described the various religious orders. Sadhus would soon be considered a fount of outright sedition with the emergence of a newer form of resistance to the colonial rule: mass nationalism. The colonial distrust of sadhu can be perceived not only in the early disdain for the Mahatma's political style, but also in the official attitude toward sadhu in north India who gravitated toward

Gandhi in the early 1920s. Such Sadhus were derided in the police fact sheets as "political sadhus." Using the life of a Hindu ascetic who lived at the end of the 18th century, he demonstrates that Hindu warrior Sadhus were not only pervasive in the medieval and early modern Indian past but were also an essential component of the South Asian military labor market and crucial to the fall of British imperialism (Pinch, 2006).

Similarly, Warren Hasting declared a proclamation banning all "Baraugies and Sannasses" from Company Bengal, save for those "fixed inhabitants" who quietly employ themselves in religious functions in 1773 (Pinch, 2006:18). Central to the Hasting's ban, as has been noted, was an Enlightenment conception of religion that allowed no maneuvering room for the freewheeling, death-defying, transgressor ascetics. In North India, at the end of the eighteenth century, Gosain *Sanyasis* were becoming the most politically powerful. *Dasnami* warrior-renouncers confirm this understanding of renunciation; precisely because warrior renouncers stood outside the Brahmanical system, could they thus engage in warfare. They were, like all (ideal-typical) world renouncers, not bound by the overall Brahmanical social hierarchy defined by ritual purity and impurity. And throughout his study, Pinch cites examples of the non-social or extra-societal behavior attributed to world renouncers (Pinch, 2006: pp. 58-61).

The question of being *Sanyasi* or renunciation is taken up from the perspective of the philosophy of rational choice by Edna Ullmann-Margalit in "Opting: The Case of 'Big' Decision." She puts forward a series of distinctions between types of decision making and suggestions that rational choice theory applies only to 'middle-sized' decision. Large and life-changing decisions, she designates "opting." She points out that "opting" is similar to "converting" in that both refer to "life-transforming, core-affecting, largely irrevocable" life events. However, unlike "opting" decisions, in renunciation it is not the case that one believes that one is called upon to make a genuine decision between equally viable alternatives (Ullmann-Margalit, 1985:446). Unlike religious conversion in which the convert views his previous life...as wrong or wicked, renunciation is better understood in terms of "drifting" since it is a way of arriving at either renouncer or caste-like *Sanyasi* without any actual decisions. Being *Sanyasi* is a big decision, but the decision to return to marital life is made without such choices. Therefore, the formation of householders *Dasnami Sanyasi* was better understood in terms of 'opting' or even just 'drifting' and not principles of renunciation at all.

All classical *Dasnami* renouncers practiced yoga (spiritual disciplines) to overcome the fear of death (Pinch, 2006: pp. 14-17). World renunciation does not

always conform to Brahmanical purity and control. Located outside the realm of the Brahmanical societal hierarchy, renunciation is a dangerously non-conformist sphere, implying a form of transcendence on earth entailing neither everyday (social) life nor physical death, but a social limbo of living death in which the distinctions between the human and the divine fade away.

William Pinch (2006) does not always consistently draw the full conclusion that renunciation in its most radical form entails a total break from any type of social convention. Pinch refers to “proper world renunciation”, which only refers to the Brahmanical version, which stresses vegetarianism, nonviolence, and celibacy (Pinch, 2006, p. 57). Dumont (1980, p. 267-286) proposed a purely dualistic sociological model of “renouncer” versus “man-in-the world” in which the former is a total individual as against the “man-in-the world” who is defined by his inalienable socio-religious roles based on birth and hierarchical status. However, Dumont further argued that the total world renouncer stands in full opposition to the sacred social order which he (or she) renounces, because through renunciation, the renouncer merges—as it were—with the ultimate source of the holy socio-religious and cosmic order and hence becomes a law unto himself. From this solitary sacred perspective, the unconventional behavior of the renouncer becomes intelligible, including joining a military of warrior-sannyasis. Indeed, Dumont does not theorize the sect as a band of renouncers; he instead simply regards the sect as a variant of Brahmanism (Dumont 1980: 284).

It could be argued that after gaining special powers, the *Sanyasi* returns to the social world to use what he has acquired for worldly purposes. This interpretation makes sense of the transformations of *Dasnami Sanyasi* from renouncer to ‘man-in-the-world.’ Therefore, the *Dasnami Sanyasi* did not abandon the (social hierarchical) world altogether and forever like stereotypical understanding renouncer as a permanent renouncer.

Land Transformation from *Dasnami Sanyasi Matha* to Private Property

In the sixteenth -seventeenth centuries AD, *Dasnami Sanyasi* are seen as very instrumental in the Kathmandu valley. It observed that the Malla rulers of the valley extensively patronized them and provided enough *Guthi*-land for the maintenance of their monastic institutions (Pandey, 2059 BS). For example, most of the monasteries of the *Dasnami Sanyasi* were built during Rajya PrakashMalla. The *Mathas* of the valley came into (non)-existence of present form after the *Mahanta* became householders. In most cases they had married their female disciples, and started the family-lineages. This fact is found in the family history of *Tuilako Matha* at Lalitpur. When I interviewed a *Gharbare Mahanta* of Lalitpur, he revealed the story of *Tuilako Matha* property transformation. The story is:

A Puri *Mahanta* got married and his progenies got *Guthi*-land of the *Matha*. They registered land in their names and became sole owners like land-lords of the other parts of the state. The eldest son of the *Mahanta* succeeded the father and became the sole owner of Math-lands; however he was obliged to provide land to the tenants, younger brothers who lived as ordinary householder of the society. Shares were even given to the sisters, and the land appropriated to their names was registered in the government revenue office for their permanent ownership.

Ram Niwas Pandey documented the status of *Dasnami Sanyasi Matha* at Lalitpur. He noted that Tuvaha *Matha* of the Puris, now under the ownership of the Kusales of Mangal Bazar, is almost collapsed (Pandey, 2059 BS). The last *Mahanta* of the *Matha*, on finding himself childless, sold the *Matha* to the Kusales of the neighborhood. Since the antiquarian rules of the country do not allow the dismantling of an archaeological building, they have left it in utter neglect to collapse quickly for providing a place for a modern structure. Similarly, Pandey noted that the present *Gharbare-Mahanta* of Bahalukha *Matha*, owing to the fear of loss of the monastery's *Guthi*-land, often denied land transformation history (Pandey, 2059).

This case showed that there was not only the transformation of *Dasnami Mahanta* into *Gharbare Sanyasi* but also the transformation of *Tanami* institutional (*Guthi*) land into private ownership. The main reason of the transformation for both celibate *Mahanta* and institutional land was the change of the cultural value of the society. Religion and traditional cultural practices were highly valued before penetrating global capitalism and profited oriented private property system. Economic value gradually surpassed social and cultural values in many societies around the 18th century (Graeber, 2001). Capitalist economic value not only degraded value of *Dasnami Sanyasi* status in society but also ruptured collective institutions and cultural practices of *Dasnami Sanyasi* in Nepal. Private property and economic behavior of classical *Dasnami Sanyasi* were fundamental paradoxical to capitalism. When private property and sophisticated consumption behaviors were highly valued, the downfall of *Sanyasi* values escalated.

Legal Status of *Dasnami Sanyasi* in Nepal

In Nepal, there are many householder *Sanyasi* (s) who are recognized in official surveys as being a caste. The term *Sanyasi* is usually understood to refer to a caste rather than a renunciate, the term Jogi-Yogi generally being used to refer to a Sadhu (sometimes a disappearing manner). The old legal code 1854 and its subsequent amendments in 1935 and 1963 were not concerned with the violation of celibacy rules, but with infraction of caste rules of the association. In the codes, *Sanyasi* are generally

referred to either by the Persian term Phakir or as Bhesdhari (a wearer of ascetic's clothes, the fakir and Bhesdhari was the name given by British officers in Bengal) and specifically *Sanyasi*, Bairagi (refers to ascetics oriented towards Vishnu or one of the avatars Rama or Krishna), Udasi, Jangam and Sevada terms which refer to, respectively, *Dasnami*, Ramanandi, Udasin (Shik), Virasava, and Jaina orders. The significant difference between *Sanyasi* and *Dasnami* was religious orientation. The Hindu ascetics have been known across the centuries by various names. There were *Sanyasi* in Buddhist, Christian, Shikha, Jain, and Christian religious order. Moreover, there were varieties of *Sanyasi* within the Hindu religion, but *Dasnami Sanyasi*s Hindu and Shaiva Margi. Ghantakarna (later transformed into Kanphatta) Natha and Yogi (surname) were not *Dasnami*. Therefore, there was a specification of belongingness and membership in *Dasnami*. The Government of Nepal treated all *Sanyasi* within a single category "*Sanyasi*" (from 1854 to 2010) and "*Sanyasi/Dasnami*" (from 2011 to at present). The term Jati is used in two senses in the codes, one being caste in general (including the particular caste a renunciate previously belonged to) and the other being the order (such as *Sanyasi*) that the renunciate belongs to. In the code of 1854, three categories of ascetics are acknowledged: Ramta, those always on pilgrimage who are assumed to be Indian; *Mathadharies*, who own and live in a monastery; and *Gharbaries*, married ascetics. All three types of ascetics may initiate disciples, but only *Mathadhri* and *Gharbare* are subject to punishments prescribed for transgressions under the code. Two chief concern of the legal code are improper initiation (fakir sitaMudinya) and improper sexual relations*. Impure (Untouchable) castes were forbidden to initiate into renunciation. There is also a prohibition on renunciates performing the Bartabandha for householder *Sanyasies* (Hofer, 1979).

Concerning sexual relations, the code makes no distinction between ascetic order and other Jats in the general hierarchy of castes, no reference being made to the ascetic tradition or ideology of renunciation, which prohibits sexual relations. The code is not concerned with infraction of celibacy rules, but with the infraction of caste rules of the association. In the hierarchy of castes, at the top are Upadhya Brahmans (Pure), under which respectively are, Thakuri and Rajput, then Jaisi, Tagadhari Chhetri, and Indian Brahmans. In sixth place, regardless of renunciate order, are renunciate as mentioned above *Jats* ranking just under *Asali Jaisi*.

* If a girl or a boy who is under 12 years old should be initiated, then the initiator (Gharbari or Mathdhari) is subject to 3 years prison and confiscation of property; initiation of a girl under 16 (married or a widow) results in a year prison; no one may be initiated against their will, initiator will be punished for doing so, under specific circumstances, one force ably initiated may be readmitted to his/her caste with appropriate rites.

Andre Horef (1979) noted that ascetics were classified as inferior "cord-wearers." In the usual enumerations of caste, the ascetics ranked above the lower Jaisi (*Dotiyal Jaisi* and *Jumli Jaisi*), representing the lowest "Cord-wearers." One such enumeration reads as follows:

1. Upadhyaya
2. Rajput
3. Asali Jaisi
4. Chhetri
5. Dew Bhaju (Newar Brahmins)
6. Tirhutiya (Brahmins from the Tarai and North India)
7. Bhatt (North Indian Brahmins)
8. Other Indian Brahmins
9. Dasnam-Jogi-Jangam-*Sanyasi*-Sewada-Bairagi-Kanphatta-Nanak-Udasi-Baghar- and all the ascetics (Gairha Bhesdhari)
10. Lower Jaisi (tin limgadekhiko jaisi)- Dotiyal Jaisi- Jumli Jaisi
11. Non-Enslavable Alcohol Drinker (Hofer. 1979: 107).

The Bhesdhari are considered as quite a high caste and treated as such according to the law. The code specifies that if a Dasnam or other order of ascetics has sexual relation with a woman of a caste higher than him, then, as a member of any other caste of similar rank, he is subject to punishment, the severity of which depends on the number of women violated and the age of the girl. The most severe punishment, of ten years in prison, is for sexual relations with a girl under 11 years old equal to other Tagadhari Chhetri castes. There are also provisions for the punishment of an ascetic who seduces a woman whom he has initiated. The revised penal code of 1935 contains many of the earlier provisions and more restrictive penal, in terms of caste and age concerning eligibility for renunciation; no one less than 13 years old may be initiated. In this code, a husband may kill a *Sanyasi* who seduces his wife, but not if the renunciate is a Brahman (Bouillier, 1978: 149).

There was a very fascinating story of caste ethnic distribution in census collection from 1952-54 to 1991 by CBS. The caste ethnic distribution census report of the country was not published till 1991. After the revival of democracy, caste ethnic composition of the country has been published. In 1991, Brahmins were divided into "Hill Brahmin", and "Tarai Brahmin"; Chhetri, Thakuri, and Rajput (Tarai Chhetri-Thakuri) were separately categorized. Kami, Lohar, and Tamta were also separately written. For the *Sanyasi*, all caste ethnic groups, religious orientations, and regional variations were included in a single category "*Sanyasi*" (CBS, 1991). '*Dasnami*' as an option word of *Sanyasi* was the first included in 2011 (CBS, 2011). It was heard that

there were difficulties for the experts to understand varieties of *Sanyasi*. It does not mean that a single *Sanyasi* category is better at the cost of experts' knowledge. Rabindra Giri (ex-chairperson of Nepal *Dasnami Samaj*) argued that *Sanyasi* is an umbrella term for all sub-sects. He interrogated, "Why authority did not apply *Dasnami*, Ramanandi, Natha, and Satnami separately in the category? There are *Sanyasi* experts who could assist with the problems of classification of "*Sanyasi*" communities. There was still space for the specific categorization in terms of caste ethnic distribution." There was a *Sanyasi* caste within Newar (Kapali, Darsandhari and Jogi) that were excluded from the CBS's "*Sanyasi/ Dasnami*" group. Besides Hindu, Sikha, Buddhist, Jain, and Christian *Sanyasi** were included in the category of *Sanyasi/ Dasnami*. Nepal *Dasnami Sanyasi Samaj* was an umbrella organization of only *Dasnami* claimed the rightful descendant of Sankaracharya and the owner of Pashupati. The *Dasnami* and other orders of *Sanyasi* have slightly deviated in terms of religious orientation. For instance, *Kanfatta Sanyasi* and Yogi worship Gorakhnath. Ramanandi worship Ram. *Dasnami* are Shava (Shiva) worshippers. Other *Sanyasis* were not allowed to use Pashupati premises.

There was no categorical indication of *Dasnami Sanyasi* in New Legal code 1963 and other legal documents of the government till 2015. Social inclusion became political discourse as well as policy plans of the government after 1990. The main reason for the collapse of the first Constituent Assembly was its failure to reach an agreement on the number, boundaries, or names of the new federal states. Brahmin, Chhetri, Thakuri, and *Sanyasi* were put under the category of "others" in the official documents. In the second Constituent Assembly in 2013 and sitting from January 2014, the balance of power certainly shifted away from both 'ethnic' and 'identity-based' federalism. Maoists acknowledged that they had failed to explain their position on Khas-Arya in federal system, which they believed was the 'main reason' for their setback. It was described how the Bahuns (Brahmans) and Chhetris (Kshatriyas) of Nepal were shaken out of their complacency by—as they saw it—being classier as 'others' and 'denied identity.' Suddenly they became politically assertive as *Bahamas* and as *Chhetris* and began to make claims for cultural and political recognition for the first time. Interestingly, there were "Non-Khas" *Sanyasi* in *Sanyasi/Dasnami* and their population number was used in the *Khas* communities. There is also lacuna of Anthropological study of the cultural diversity of the category "*Sanyasi/Dasnami*." I argue that democracy and ethnic politics in the country develop and escalate the participation of *Dasnami* in the identity campaigns.

* According to the CBS 2001, the sanyasi was divided into different religions: Hindu (197554), Buddhist (707), *Kirati*, (177), Christian (326), Shikha (22), other (341).

Technically, the much smaller Thakuri and *Sanyasi* (equivalent in status to Chhetri) groups should be included here; for brevity, we refer to ‘Bahuns and Chhetris’ understood to include smaller aligned groups, just as Nepalis themselves frequently refer to them all as ‘Chhetri-Bahun’ or ‘Bahun-Chhetri.’ David Gellner and Krishna Adhikari pointed out that, though they do indeed come together as a single bloc under certain circumstances, there were significant differences—cultural, political, and historical—between them as well (Adhakari and Gellner, 2012). Their indication was smaller groups lost their identity in the name of Brahmin-Chhetri and opportunities of ‘*Dasnami/Sanyasi*’ were relatively less in comparison to Brahmin-Chhetri. Article 24 (1) of the Nepalese constitution 2015 states that the Khas-Arya group is included social justice for the poor and powerless community. Article 84 (2) discloses belongingness of the Khas-Arya group: Brahmin, Chhetri, Thakuri, and *Sanyasi* (*Dasnami*). The same inclusive statement is stated for the federal structure in articles 176 (6), 259 (1) and 267 (3). In this way, the Nepalese constitution 2015 acknowledged the identity and prevalence of *Dasnami Sanyasi* though the community is engulfed by Brahmin-Chhetri identity.

Identity Campaigns of *Dasnami Samaj*

According to a CBS (2011) report, the *Dasnami Sanyasi* was found in 74 districts of Nepal. Their population was 227822 (0.85% of Nepal) and Dang, Kathmandu, Sindhupalchok, and Jhapa had more than ten thousand population of *Dasnami*. Because of the delegations of *Dasnami Sanyasi*, the word *Dasnami* was included in the caste ethnic distribution of the census of Nepal. There was only the *Sanyasi* category in the census of 1991 (in which their total population was 181,726 (0.98%)) and 2001 (in which their total population was 199,127 (0.88% out of total population of Nepal)). There were cultural variations among ten names and with the single name (community). Many of them have their own *Bamshabali Gotra* and origin stories. They have their own understanding and caste practices and status within the national framework of caste/ethnic groupings. There were efforts to form collective organizations in different districts, but there was no single umbrella organization of the *Dasnami Sanyasi* until the early 1990s.

The initiation of the organized body of Nepal *Dasnami Samaj* was started by the *Mahantas* of Dattatraya *Matha* in 2052 BS. Rajendra P. Giri, Nabraj Giri, and Chhetra B. Giri were interested in unify ten names under a single umbrella. On their initiation, 33 members preliminary committed was formed, and the committee gave the name – Nepal *Dasnami Samaj* in 2053. The organization was registered at the Kathmandu district administration office in 2054. Jayram Puri voluntarily donates the central office

in his home at Maitigharin 2057 BS. The *Samar* has been conducting various programs besides regular meetings and discussions. The constitution of the *Samaj* stated that the main objective of the *Samaj* was to unify all *Dasnami* under a uniform cultural, and identity banner. The unstated objective of the *Samaj* was to protect traditional cultural heritage, *Mathas*, *Asrams*, public resources, and articulate collective voice for reorganization and participation.

The *Samaj* claimed that *Dasnami Sanyasi* was the main priests in Pashupatinath temple in Kathmandu before South Indian Bhatt (Nepal *Dasnami Samaj*, 2073). Dr. Govind Tandon, the member-secretary of Pashupati Area Development Trust, said that it was almost 300 years ago that the trend of appointing Indian Bhatta at the Pashupati temple began. Before this, daily worship and other duties of the temple were carried out by *Sanyasi*. It is also claimed that *Dasnami Sanyasi* was written in *Bhashabamshabali* and *Shilalekha* in Pashupati temple. The tradition was ended when Brahmins from Kashi were brought in the 12th century. Again Ratna Malla (1539-1577 BS) resumed *Sanyasi's* the main priest in the Pashupati. *Sanyasi* who renounced family were orally tested and appointed as the main priests of Pashupati. Records revealed that Somshekharananda, Bhairabanand, Nityananda, Gyanananda, Bimalananda, Radhawananda, and Kapilananda were appointed main priest of the temple (Nepal *Dasnami Samaj* 2073). It was argued that renounced *Sanyasi* were true devotees of Dharma and gods because they sacrifice life for the sake of godly life. They were extraordinary humans but Jayprakash Malla changed the roles of extra-human to general human. Then, Jayprakash Malla started south Indian Bhatta priest in the Pashupati. The *Samaj* argued that the position of *Dasnami Sanyasi* was confiscated and given to South India Bhatta. The concept of *Sanyasi* priest was not only connected to the spiritual values but also proper management of Pashupati's income. The seed of corruption at Pashupatinath's income was planted by Jayprakash Malla by appointed priest from the *Gharbare* Brahmin community (Pandey, 2059 BS). Indian Brahmins were regarded as highly pure status.

Moreover, the Pashupati vicinity has been culturally connected with *Dasnami Sanyasi*. The forest area across the Bagmati River has been used by *Dasnami Sanyasi* for their death burial and meditation shelter. Householders *Dasnami* people were also allowed to use the space for the burial of their members. *Kiratis* Communities and converted Christian communities also started from using the premises for the grave of their dead bodies. When *Dasnami Sanyasi* restricted funeral of *Kiratis* and Christian communities. Chhari Gahatraj filed an application in the supreme court for positive order. The court ordered not to restrict dead bodies of the *Kiratis* and Christian communities. Then, Bharat Jangham filed the writ in the Supreme Court against the encroachment of the *Dasnami* cultural area. The court ordered the government to stop

Kiratis and other communities to use the Pashupati premises and also request to manage another place for the death burial of the *Kiratis* and Christians. Bharat Jangham, one of the *Samaj* speakers, said that he has been fighting for the *Dasnami Samaj* against other communities' encroachment at *Dasnami's* traditional heritage and cultural premises around Pashupati. He filed a writ in Supreme Court against the encroachment of *Bankable forest* by Non-*Dasnami* communities for the dead burial ground. He invoked all the participants in a meeting to protect of the heritage space for the *Dasnami* communities. Nepal *Dasnami Samaj* has been certified the corpus if the person was *Dasnami*, otherwise, the dead were not allowed for burial in the Pashupati area.

The leader of the *Samaj* said that *Dasnamies* were politically divided into much political ideologies. It was said that the *Samaj* was out of the influence of political parties. Rabindra Giri, one of the key informants and ex-chairperson of the *Dasnami Samaj*, said that the main objective of the *Dasnami Samaj* was cultural politics or politics of unity, cooperation, and protection of common cultural heritages, but it did not influence *Dasnamies* under the flag of particular political parties. Moreover, common understandings to support *Dasnami* candidates during national and local elections were made by central and district level committees. This strategy was utilized in many districts. One of the interesting parts, of the *Samaj* was that *Samaj* tries to disentangle *Dasnami* from the category of Brahmin-Chhetri. *Dasnami Sanyasi* or all *Sanyasi* should be categorized separately. Because of the large chunk of the population of Brahmin and Chhetri, *Dasnami Sanyasi* as a separate group lost within the groups. In academic writing and media presentation, *Dasnami* was treated as Chhetri. There was no single logic to treat the *Sanyasi* as equivalent to Chhetri. If they were treated based on old *Muluki Ain*, they must be separate, probably inferior category than Chhetri. If they were treated based on previous caste myths and stories, most of them were derivative of Brahmin groups.

Putting *Sanyasi* in the Brahmin-Chhetri community was an arbitrary category of the government. Keshab Giri, one of the ex-Indian army, said that the British did not allow the community whereas Indian officials permitted if the applicant had proved his Chhetri status. He added that some of the *Dasnami* people had changed their last name from Giri, Puri, Bharati to Chhetri. Because of humiliation of being lower caste and non-caste, lay-*Sanyasi* called themselves Chhetri in many villages. In some cases, naming Chhetri was easy access to enroll in army, police, and other government jobs in Nepal and India. I found both types of cases among the *Dasnami Sanyasi* in Sidhupalchok. In the everyday life, they were not considered as Chhetri, though their activities and orientations were not different from castes. Changing last name and adopting rituals of higher castes were prevalent among the *Dasnami Sanyasi* of Nepal.

Dasnami Sanyasi (s) are a derivative community because they are transformed mostly from the Hindu high castes. There were different stories of derivation into *Dasnami*. For instance, I belong to *Balampure Sanyasi* (Giri), one of the member community of *Dasnami Sanyasi* in Pyuthan district. *Dasnami* is new identity and the most of *Gharbare Sanyasi* do not know about *Dasnami*. They are treated as caste in everyday interaction in society. Various types of Giri (s) in the village were regarded as different caste equivalent to other *Sanyasi* community. They are *Dasnami* endogamous, and their myths of derivative origin are different.

Nepal *Dasnami* Youth, a newly founded organization, expanded its' network in many districts of Nepal. The network organized cleaning and garbage collection in Pashupati premises recently. They printed the brand of Nepal *Dasnami* Youth an orange color t-shirt, and distributed it to the *Dasnami* to create unity and brotherhood among the ten names. As written in the document, the youth network's objective is to create *Dasnami* identity, protection of *Dasnami* cultural heritage, and exchange brotherhood among the members. Thakur Giri, the chairperson of the *Dasnami Samaj* Pyuthan branch, argued that the *Samaj* is a common platform to unify all *Dasnami Sanyasi* in the district and build identity consciousness among the peoples. Every *Dasnami Sanyasi* family has to pay a certain amount to be member of district *Dasnami Sanyasi*. One member of each household was invited to the district level convention in 2017. The district *Samaj* implicitly mobilized *Dasnami* people to vote in the line of *Dasnami Samaj* common understanding to support own member irrespective of political ideology. The common understanding was materialized when *Dasnami* candidates got the victory in different levels.

Conclusion

Classical texts explained that *Dasnami Sanyasi* (s) were people out of caste hierarchy, but they were treated as a caste groups in society. In the course of time living with high caste communities, *Sanyasi* (s) accustomed to castes in processes of Sanskritization. In some places, *Dasnami Sanyasi* (s) felt the humiliation of being inferior, and high caste people called *Dasnami* by using insulting terms like '*Jogi*' (beggar), and night roamer. On the contrary, *Dasnami* compared themselves with caste communities and turned like caste communities. Capitalism transformed *Dasnami Sanyasi*'s classical values from celibacy and collectivity to *Gharbare Mahanta* and the profit motive of institutional property. This was the starting point of the ruin of *Dasnami* status and culture in Nepal. Some of them followed the Sanskritization model to incline Chhetri communities. Except for mortuary and initiation rituals of *Dasnami*, other all cultural and livelihood strategies are like high castes communities. *Gharbare Sanyasi* are not proper renouncers who ought to practice virtue. However, historical

findings regarding warrior-sannyasis assert that *Gharbare* was not a typical ascetic and certainly did not abandon the world for the life of a 'world renouncer.'

Moreover, the state has socialized the community as caste, and consequently, the community collectively claimed as a different caste identity. The old Legal code 1854 classified all *Sanyasi* communities and individuals as inferior Chhetri (cord-wearers) irrespective of their difference. The regulations of the code were stemmed from the interdictions regarding *Bhat* (rice) and sexual intercourse as castes. After this code, *Dasnami Sanyasi* communities transformed themselves like Chhetri. Some of them started *Bartabandha* and funeral pyre as Chhetri caste. After 1990, many caste/ethnic groups were vocal in the field of identity politics. The *Dasnami Sanyasi* also felt to preserve their identity and initiated institutional efforts. Nepal *Dasnami Sanyasi*, the umbrella organization of the ten sure names communities, ran campaigns of telling *Dasnami Sanyasi* during the census, an extension of district branch and protection of traditional cultural heritage at local, and national levels.

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