Development with Identity: Development Policy in a Multiethnic State Nepal

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Abstract

The concept of development with identity also termed ethno-development refers to development policies that are sensitive to the needs of indigenous people and ethnic minorities. It is the opposite concept of the ethnocidal strategy of development. As the then prime minister of Nepal KP. Sharma Oli proclaimed that the government would destroy the huge stone in the Saptakoshi / Koshi as it hindered the steamship on its way in a public program in Biratnagar, people from Kirati community, one of the groups of indigenous nationalities of Nepal, opposed the assertion and launched a series of protest programs since the huge stone has been supposed to be a mythically historical stone for them. This event raised the issue of ethno-development. In this article, I have argued that the Eurocentric and purely economy-centric development practices have created the condition of conflict rather than cohesion in the multiethnic country since social, civilizational, and cultural dimensions of the people are entirely ignored by this practice. Therefore, development with identity is an appropriate policy of development for a country like Nepal having diversity in terms of civilization, ethnicity, culture, and language. I have adopted in-depth interviews based on the qualitative approach in this research.

Keywords: Ethno-development, heterogeneity, ethnic identity, development, modernization, Nepal

Context

Primarily, we are in a capitalistic world system at present. The essence of it is to earn endless profit from the production of goods and services. It has commodified everything for profit. It has disregarded both natural and social environments for profit. So, it is in a grave crisis (Wallerstein, 1974). The slogan "another world is possible" has been heard against the adverse environmental and social effects of this system. As a result, an alternative policy has

been sought in the field of development particularly in a country with heterogeneity in terms of civilization, culture, and language. Hettne (2002), in the context of development, talks about alternative forms of global governance.

The concept of development with identity also termed as ethno-development refers to the development policies and processes that are sensitive to the needs of indigenous people and ethnic minorities (Hettne, 1996). It is relatively a new concept from which to rethink the assumptions underlying conventional development models. It appears to have been coined in 1980 by Rohin Talall. Ethno-development was explored there as a means of making indigenous and ethnic minorities less vulnerable to dominant societies through a program that is culturally sensitive and produces a degree of economic, social, and political autonomy (Talall, 1984). The term was incorporated two years later into development discourse at a UNESCO conference in Africa. At that time, it was used to refer to remediation for government policies and development strategies that threatened ethnic identity and self-determination (UNESCO, 1982).

On 8 Push, 2077 BS. the then prime minister of Nepal KP. Sharma Oli proclaimed that the government would destroy the huge stone in the *Saptakoshi / Koshi* as it hindered the steamship on its way in a public program in Biratnagar. People from *Kirati*[1] community which is one of the communities of indigenous nationalities of Nepal opposed the assertion and launched a series of protest programs since the huge stone has been supposed to be a mythically historical stone for them. It is known as *Khuwalung*[2] in their term. They have claimed that it is not only a stone but their history and civilization (Chamling, 2078). It is a place of great importance in their oral history-*Mundhum*[3]. Studying and understanding their history, culture, and civilization, *Khuwalung* must be protected, they have claimed. Also, they have announced that they discard the development projects which abolish their history and culture.

This event has created a debate on development policies and practices to be adopted in our context. And, the protest has multi-dimensional implications in development models and practice. This event shed light on the correlation between socio-cultural circumstances and development. The agitation against the intention of demolishing *Khuwalung* for so-called development has generated a debate on whether economic growth is only the essence of development. It has shed light on the socio-cultural dimension of development to be sought in a state having a heterogeneous society.

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[1]Rai, Limbu, Yakkha, and Sunuwar are declared to be Kirati though there are many other groups as well who are supposed to be Kirati.

[2]Khuwalung is a mythical stone situated in Saptakoshi. It is situated at the place where three rivers Dudhakoshi, Arun, and Tamor meet near the border of three districts – Bhojpur, Udaypur, and Dhankuta nearby Chatara, Sunsary. It is supposed to be a mythical historical place for Kirati people based on their oral history called Mundhum.

[3] Mundhum is an oral history of the Kirati people. It includes their worldview. Not only this, it includes their history of migration, ritual practices, method of treatment

Essentially, development is a sociological phenomenon. A particular society has a particular kind of development policy and practice for its overall development. As it is a sociological phenomenon, sociological issues must be given due consideration for the development of a particular society not only for its quality development but also for its sustainability since if the development projects are contrary to the values, culture, history, or civilization of the targeted community/people for development, the people do not own it.

Development is a contested concept. It is a different thing for a different time and a different thing for different people. It is supposed to be building capability and enhancement of choice along with freedom (Sen,2014; 1990)**.** According to Escobar (2011), development policies have become mechanisms of control and policy of recolonization of the third world. For (Esteva, 1992), it is the continuation of colonialism by other means (p.2). Both Escobar and Esteva seek alternative development policies and practices for well-being in the third world. Ethno-development is one of the policies that advocates development with identity, particularly in a heterogeneous society. Protection of cultural identity, ensuring self-rule and autonomy, and community participation are key components of such development policy. If the development policies are blind to these things, the development becomes neither sustainable nor ensures social justice. Development without participation and social justice does not bring well-being.

Hettne (1995) argues that development is viewed as a "strengthening of the material based of the state, mainly through industrialization" (p.22). It is a Western and Eurocentric concept. And, almost all over the world, the same concept of development was taken for granted. According to this concept, development equals modernity (Wills, 2005). Modernity through development is viewed as "the condition of being modern, new or up-to-date" (p.2). It is based on dominant logic (Dubee, 2007). Dominant logic, according to Dubee (2007) is "the way a group of people views and interpret the world" (p.253). From this viewpoint, indigenous societies are taken as an obstacle in the process of development (Hettne, 1995) since they are not new or up-to-date based on the logic of modernization.

Here, in this article, I have argued that development policy and practice should be based on the nature and aspiration of the people in general, and with identity in particular, in a heterogenous society in terms of ethnicity, language, culture, and civilization. 'One-size-fits-all' policy and practice of development disregard the culture, norms, and values of some communities particularly of Indigenous nationalities since they are excluded in the process of making and implementing development policy and project. And, it may become a source of conflict. What I have argued here is that the 'one-size-fits-all' strategy of development which we have followed for a long period has become a source of conflict in our heterogeneous society. Therefore, ethno-development or development with identity can be an appropriate model of development practice in a heterogenous society like ours. For this purpose, I have taken in-depth interviews for primary information and different published and unpublished books, journal articles, and book chapters for secondary information.

Appraisal of Modernization Theory of Development in Multiethnic State

Modernization is a 'One-size-fits-all' strategy of development. Development through the process of modernization is to develop a so-called undeveloped, traditional society following the cultural characteristics of Western societies. This approach is purely Eurocentric, economic-centric, and ethnocide. Economic growth is the central Western thinking of modernity (Will, 2005). It is measured in monetary income or per capita income. The concern with modernization and development emerged after the Second World War in the context of the development of the Third World (Eisenstadt, 1974). In this view, modern society has a high level of differentiation and a high degree of organic division of labor whereas traditional society is static with little differentiation or specialization (ibid.). It is blind to different civilizations, cultures, capabilities, and access to resources of all people. Industrialization, urbanization, and Westernization are basic tenets of modernization.

Modernization, in essence, is Westernization, Europeanization, or the Americanization process in the Third World, economically poor countries of Asia and Africa, in the name of development. So, modernization is an irreversible process of being West, or Europe and America. Development, therefore, is a process of recolonization of economically poor countries, the so-called Third World, (Escobar, 2011; Esteva, 1992). It is ethnocidal, in essence. Once third-world countries come into contact with the West, they will not be able to resist the impetus toward modernization (Reyes, 2001).

Adopting an integrative rather than a pluralistic policy of development through modernization has created a condition of conflict rather than cohesion in multiethnic states. The integrative policy of modernization seeks to homogenize the society of heterogeneity in terms of ethnicity, language, and culture in the name of national integration or unity. And, it is the national goal of development. An attempt to create a sense of Nepali nationhood, by promoting a common set of symbols, a process referred to as Nepalization (Bista 1982; Gaige, 1975) is an example in our context. The aim behind it, according to Kailash Pyakuryal, is "it has become the aim of the government to integrate different ethnic groups towards a common goal of national development. Nepal aspires to achieve a common culture which could be the binding force, and attempts to create a socio-economic environment which could motivate everyone to achieve the national goal so development" (Pyakuryal, 1982:70). But such attempt has brought the condition of conflict since it caused the exclusion of distinct civilization of indigenous nationalities of Nepal.

Since modernization or integrative policy is a homogenization process, it has a tendency toward convergence among societies (Levy, 1967). The convergence becomes the convergence of dominated groups and cultures into dominant groups and cultures; or convergence into western culture. Such a process ultimately gives birth to both intra and inter-state conflict when the dominated groups or cultures seek their identity in a heterogeneous society. Huntington (1993) predicts the clash of civilizations on the same basis. Demolishing a huge stone (*Khuwalung*) in the Koshi River which sparked agitation in the Kirat community people is an example of it.

The theory of development as modernization, according to Rostow, is based on the five stages of development of society. These five stages are traditional society, a precondition for takeoff, the takeoff process, the drive to maturity, and high mass consumption society. The ultimate goal of this process is to make a high-mass consumption society. And for it, production from capital investment is the main mechanism. If the problem facing Third World countries lack of productive investment, the solution lies in the provision of aid to these countries in the form of capital, technology, and experts from rich countries.

Since the end of World War II and after being independent, indigenous nationalities, and ethnic minorities have been adversely affected by such processes in the name of development (Hettne, 2009). In the context of Southeast Asia, the practice of development through modernization has adverse effects on indigenous and ethnic communities and generates conflicts between states and ethnic minorities (Clarke, 2001). Dieu (1996) minutely explores the impact of hydraulic development projects on the indigenous people of Asia. Acharya (2018), argues that the rapid urbanization process harms the livelihood of Majhi, one of the indigenous community, people in Nepal.

In this approach, in the name of modernization, the religious or spiritual beliefs of indigenous people and ethnic minorities are condemned as they are traditional and superstitious. The religious festivals of indigenous people have been condemned, circumscribed, or banned as wasteful. The indigenous production and practice of economic life have been condemned and forced to leave. The hidden purpose behind this act is to force them to subscribe to mainstream religion. For example, in Indonesia, Indonesians are required by law to adhere to one of the main world religions (Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, Confucianism, or Taoism). The practice of forbidding and prohibiting animist rituals and labeling them as superstitious practiced by indigenous people in Vietnam is another example of such a kind (Clarke, 2001).

On another hand, this approach, in the name of development, continues to force local communities to develop in ways external to their frames of reference. Therefore, a relatively widespread view today is that the very meaning of development is an imposition of institutions and values by the West on areas deemed to require development guided by all explanatory development theory (Hettne, 2009). It is true because development practice in underdeveloped and developing countries is rooted in colonialism. It contains, therefore, a measure of paternalism (ibid.). So, it is colonial (Langdon, 2009). Consequently, such an approach is opposed in heterogeneous societies. It has failed since it is being applied to cultural blindness across culturally heterogeneous communities. Such a development view considers very little about whether it fits well with the worldviews of indigenous nationalities, and ethnic minorities or not (Maddison, 2009). This approach attempts to implement a homogenous development strategy throughout Indigenous communities regardless of their cultural differences (Znajda, 2014) so that it fails to develop Indigenous communities with their identity. And, indigenous nationalities oppose such development projects and processes. In this context, some argue that

indigenous nationalities are in opposition to development. But it is wrong. It is not an opposition to development but rather "challenging the scope, context, and content of mainstream development" (Radcliffe, 2012, 95. p); challenging "dominant logic" (Dubee, 2007). Hettne (1996) argues that the Eurocentric strategy which is supposed to be the mainstream development strategy generates conflicts between states and ethnic minorities since such strategies are 'ethnocidal'. They are very insensitive to cultural, language, and ethnic diversities.

Development with Identity: An Approach to Development in Multiethnic Society

The 'One-size-fits-all' strategy of development may be a source of conflict rather than development in a state with heterogeneity in terms of civilization, culture, and values because such a strategy is blind to cultural sensitivity. This strategy does not accept that development is a sociological phenomenon, sociological issues like identity-related issues of the community must be given due consideration for the development of a particular society not only for its quality development but also for its sustainability since if the development projects are contrary to the values, culture, history or civilization of the targeted community/people for development, the people do not own it. Therefore, development with identity may be the opposite approach to development in a multiethnic country.

Development with identity, also known as ethno-development or alternative development, is the process of enabling indigenous nationalities, ethnic minorities, and excluded and exploited groups to revive the values of their specific culture (UNESCO, 1982). The term 'ethnic development' has come to refer to development policies and processes that are sensitive to the needs of ethnic minorities and Indigenous people and, where possible, controlled by them (Bonfil Batalla, 1982; Wright, 1988; Bengoa, 1993; Stavenhagen, 1990; Hettne, 1996; Clarke, 2001; Partridge et at. 1996; Davis, 2002). Davis (2002) is one of the pillars to advance this concept. He maintained that development involving indigenous peoples must be built "upon the cultural strengths of the indigenous populations…. And entails their active participation" (Davis and Partridge, 1999,2 p.). He favored programs that aimed at "enhancing the ability of the indigenous organizations to design their development strategies and formulate their development projects" (Davis and Patridge, 1999, 5p.).

This approach focuses on the independent decision-making power of indigenous, ethnic groups through more effective control of the political, economic, social, and cultural processes to strengthen their ability to resist exploitation and oppression as well (Chernela, 2011). It is a policy in response to ethnocide, where indigenous nationalities, ethnic minorities' identities, and cultures or ways of life are being lost due to modern and large-scale development strategies. It is self-led development where indigenous, ethnic people are involved in creating a plan for their future development and organization of communities in a way that follows their traditions, beliefs, and customs. For Willis (2005), this is "an opportunity for an ethnic group to take control of its 'destiny within the context of a nation-state' (p.197). This strategy of development

builds upon the principle of subsidiary, which suggests that the decision-making authority should be in the hands of 'the closest level possible to the people or organization the decision or action is designed to serve' (Wunan Foundation Inc, 2015 cited in Clarke, 2001).

Clarke (2001) lists four principles on which the ethno-development model rests: cultural pluralism, internal self-determination, territorialism, and sustainability (Clarke, 2001, from Hettne, 1996). Cultural pluralism creates the social condition in which the small groups within a larger society maintain their unique cultural identities, values, and practices. The principle of internal self-determination guarantees the internal independence and freedom of minorities. And, territorialism as well provides the condition for exercising their political and cultural autonomy.

Development with Identity: A Case of Nepal

Nepal is a country of diversity in terms of civilization, language, caste, class, region, religion, culture, and values. According to the census in 2021, there are 142 castes and 124 languages in Nepal. There are 59 state-recognized groups of indigenous nationalities with their own language, culture, and history. They have their own understanding and practices towards livelihood and development based on indigenous knowledge. The development policy and strategy, therefore, are to be based on the reality of the diversity of Nepali society. The policies of development have to be oriented towards the protection and promotion of diversities since they are our genuine assets for other aspects of development. Such protection may help promote indigenous production which is a base of the national economy. A 'One-size-fits-all' strategy of development is not appropriate for the development of protecting and promoting our diversities. However, the development policy and practices of Nepal is homogenous, top-down, and exclusive (Limbu, 2019). The agenda of development is elite interest-driven. It is, therefore, contested (Sapkota, 2014).

Historically, opposite to the heterogeneous nature of Nepali society, since the inception of modern (?) Nepal, Prithvi Narayan Shah took the ethnocidal policy. He declared making Nepal a pure Hindu Kingdom (*Asali* Hindustan) in his speech, *Dibya Upadesh*. Though he declared Nepal as a 'common garden of four varnas and thirty-six castes', all flowers could not flourish equally. Empirically, only a single flower was seen protected, promoted, and flourished. Ethno-politics and ethno-development were ignored. And, the condition of internal colonization was felt (Bhattachan, 2012).

Rana regime institutionalized alienation and exclusion by introducing the Muluki Ain (Civil Code) of 1854 that codified Hinduism's caste structure and incorporated all groups – whether Hindu or non-Hindu – residing within its hierarchy. The Civil Code had a four-fold caste hierarchy: (1) Tagaddhari (Sacred thread wearing), including the Bahun-Chhetris; (2) Matawali (Liquor drinking, i.e. indigenous nationalities); (3) Pani machine Choi chhito halnu naparne (Castes from whom water is not acceptable and contact with whom does not require

purification by sprinkling of water); and (4) Pani nachlne choi chito halnu parne (Castes from whom water is not acceptable and contact with whom requires purification by a sprinkling of water), including Sarki, Damai, Kami, Gaine, Sunar, Badibhad, Cunara, Pode, Hurke and Cyamakhalak (Macdonald, 1984:282). These distinctions categorized the communities according to a hierarchy that led to the practice of caste-based untouchability and discrimination against Dalits widely common on an everyday basis. Though caste-based discrimination was discouraged by amending the Civil Code, it continued in practice. The result was official discrimination practiced on a massive scale, marginalizing large parts of the non-Hindu population. The culture and values were promoted by making national symbols, and national animals. In the legal code of 1854, it is said: "in the Kaliyuga this kingdom is the only kingdom in the world where cows, women, and Brahmans may not be killed (cited in Michael, 2008)".

Nepal was proclaimed a Hindu kingdom in 1962 constitutionally. As part of the construction of the new national identity, the dominant language having been known as Gorkhali or colloquially as Khas Kura was renamed "Nepali" in about 1933 (David, Malone, Suman, Von, 2013). The British called Khas Kura to Nepali in the beginning and Nepali rulers were not happy at that time. According to Clark (1969), the Gorkha rulers were displeased that the British called the language of their kingdom Nepali, especially after Prime Minister Chandra Shamsher had decreed in the early twentieth century that Gorkhali was the official language of the Kingdom. But in the 1930s, when the Gorkha Government began to refer to its Kingdom as the "realm of Nepal" (rather than the entire possessions of the Gorkha king), it also began to refer to its official language as Nepali. As the Nepali language became the national language, other various languages which were spoken in Nepal were excluded and became of the second category.

National Education System Plan (NESP) was made in 1971 aimed at assimilation and homogenization (Weinberg, 2013). It stated the goal of education to be:

> To strengthen devotion to crown, country, national unity, and the Panchayat system, to develop uniform traditions in education by bringing together various patterns under a single national policy, to limit the tradition or regional languages, to encourage financial and social mobility, and to fulfill manpower requirements essential for national development. (MoE, 1971, in Weinberg, 2013).

With the view of developing monolingual country Nepal, the report talked about the language on the playground, either from the medium of instruction. It stated that

> It should be emphasized that if Nepali is to become the true national language, then we must insist that its use be enforced in primary school… Otherwise, Nepali, though learned, may remain a 'foreign' language rather than the child's basic, thinking language. Local dialects and tongues, other than standard Nepali, should be vanished from the school and playground as early as possible in the life of the child (NNEPC, 1956).

Thus, it was tried to make Nepal a monolingual country from the beginning. Because of this process, non-Nepali language-speaking people were excluded and marginalized.

During the Panchayat era (1962-1990) the state solidified the ideas of Nepal as a Hindu society and sought to create a culturally homogenous population in the name of national unity. The Panchayat-era slogan "One language, One form of dress, One Nation (*Ek Bhasa, ek Bhes, ek Des*) reflects the state's efforts to create cultural uniformity (Hangen, 2010: 98). Creating cultural uniformity at the cost of diversity is the process of internal colonization (Etkind, 2013). Internal colonization may be a source of conflict in a multiethnic, multilingual society.

Nepal has adopted a federal form of government. Federalism is one of the mechanisms of accommodating the diversity of multiethnic and multilingual countries through political and cultural autonomy and self-determination (Elazar, 1991; Burgess, 2006; Watts, 2017). Though federalism in Nepal is monoethnic, not multination (Kymlicka, 2007) as the nature of Nepali societies, state governments can proceed with significant work of ethno-development with the protection and promotion of diversity of Nepali society. And, it must be done to foster unity in diversity in a real sense.

Khuwalung is not merely a stone but supposed to be a symbol of the identity of the Kirati people. It is supposed to be a historical place for them. One of my respondents answered, "Khuwalung *is a stone for ruler but history and identity of ours"* When I asked him "Why do you oppose breaking it down if it hiders transportation for trade?". Chamling (2021) argues that it is not only a myth but a source of history and civilization. According to Cruz & Frijhoff (2009), there is myth in history and history in myth. Rai (2021) argues that the breakdown of *Khuwalung* is a breakdown of Kirati history. Rai (2012) argues that *Khuwalung* is one of the protohistoric places for Kirat Rai people; it should be protected as their history. For them, opposition against the breakdown of *Khuwalung* is a step toward protecting our source of history. Another respondent of mine answered me *"We are not against development but we do not need development at the cost of our history and identity"* as I asked, "Why are you opposing development?". It shows that development policy and activity should consider the identity issues in a multiethnic society not to be ethnocidal. According to Dhakal, B., Chand, N., Shrestha, A., Dhakal, N., Karki, K. B., Shrestha, H. L., ... & Kattel, R. R. (2022) the policy and development agencies have led to the degradation of Indigenous resources, institutions, and the socio-ecological system in Nepal.

Conclusion

The concept of development with identity refers to the development policies and practices that are sensitive to the needs and issues of indigenous people and ethnic minorities. The 'One-size-fits-all' strategy of development, a development practice of modernization, may be a source of conflict rather than development in a state with heterogeneity in terms of civilization, culture, and values because such a strategy is blind to cultural sensitivity. Indigenous nationalities who

are sensitive to their cultural identity, oppose such development practice. Nepal as a multiethnic, multilingual, and multicultural country, therefore, has to adopt the theory and practice of development with identity to advance well-being with heterogeneity.

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चाम्लिङ, भोगिराज । (२०७८) । खुवालुङः उहिलेको यथार्थ, अहिलेको मिथक । खुवालुङ, एक ढुङ्गा, एक बडापत्र । पेज १५-३५ । बेला प्रकाशन ।

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