The impact of globalization in the emergence of civil society and identity conflict to enhance the process for social transformation.
A Case of Nepal

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the impact of globalization in Nepal to enhance the ongoing process of social transformation. While so doing, the major focus of this paper is to analyze how the phenomenon globalization, especially after the 1950s has created a ground for the emergence of civil society and identity conflict in the macro and micro level. The paper takes account of historical development of "identity conflict", which will mainly remain descriptive and analytical but also focuses on constructive criticism.

The first part of the paper will discuss the trend of globalization, its contribution to identity conflict at the state level (macro) and groups/individual level (micro).The subsequent part of the discussion would be on the emergence of civil society and identity conflict in and among groups. Finally, the paper would give a conclusion how globalization can be considered as a tool to the emergence of civil society and identity construction.

GLOBALIZATION AND IDENTITY CONFLICT AT THE MACRO LEVEL

Globalization is a global phenomenon of transaction and cooperation wherein ideas are shared and a larger nexus is formed in many dimensions. Kinvall and Jönsson, (2002:249)

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argue that globalization as conventionally understood is not a new phenomenon, but it does involve a number of novel dimensions as a result of its unprecedented scale and speed. The authors further argue that "globalization is defined here in terms of the increasing scale and speed of exchange of people, products, services, capital and ideas across international borders"(p.13). Hence, the first and the most notable result of globalization is fast growing IT, trade, demographic movement and finally geo-politics which has a remarkable effect on indigenous culture, knowledge and social infrastructure providing a good possibility for conflict at people's cognitive level and thereafter in society and politics. On this theoretical foundation we will try to analyze Nepalese society and the emerging identity awareness thereby deconstructing meaning and the frame of old identity.

Nepal, a small country sandwiched between India and China politically, geographically and economically has its own history but was never under foreign rule, though her southern neighbors were colonized. The country remained closed politically and economically until 1950s. Consequently, Nepal was isolated from the outer world but became open after the democratic system was established in 1950 overthrowing the autocratic Rana rule[1]. It was possible only because Nepali political parties, civil society and the king were assured of the necessary moral and political support from India, against Ranas[2]. The conflict between the Ranas and "the others" (people and king) ended to a certain extent in 1950s. Democracy for the first time was established but unfortunately

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[1] Rana Rule in Nepal remained very active for 104 years (1846-1950). This autocratic system forced and of course inspired people to get untied and act against such a system in order to find a new identity as citizen in a real sense.
[2] The Ranas were supported by British India but as India got freedom Ranas became weaker and it was easier for the parties and king to protest against Ranas.

did not last more than a decade. In 1960 King Mahendra sacked the people's government and took over power and began Party-less Panchayat System (PPS). Political parties were banned. From this point on, a single party system started in the name of "Panchayat system". The New Panchayat system went in favor of the elite and higher caste people. The country started being ruled by elites and higher caste people directly instructed by the king. These was, so far the base for grounding the feudal structure and lock the poor and illiterate people right in the individual level with a sense that existing system was the best and elites, higher caste people and ruler should not be questioned. It would be worth mentioning that though Nepal received heavy foreign aid[3] poverty increased. During 1951 to 1990 many five year plans were launched but could not really address people's need. Chadda (2000:122) argues that foreign economic aid stabilized and prolonged Panchayat rule and vastly expanded the power of the traditional elites, the high caste Chetris, Bahuns and Thakuri in the hills regions and Newars in Kathmandu. Hence, she further claims that such assistance not only legitimized their vision for Nepal; it gave them modern instruments to strengthen political dominance.

Here comes another "turning point" wherein the state under the Panchayat system gave rise a group which started working against Panchayat. The Nepali Congress (NC) and many left wing forces came closer as it was not possible to overthrow Panchayat without alliance. Finally, they formed an alliance and got necessary support from India again for the second time in 1990. The national conflict between the palace and Panchayat on the one side, democratic parliamentary system on the other side escalated. The Palace could

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[3] Nepal received aid totaled U.S $ 22 per capita compared to U.S. $ 2.60 India and U.S.$ 13.30 for Pakistan ,Chadda, 2000:124.

not maintain a proper relation with India when the anti-Panchayat struggle was on the street with the moral support of Indian leaders. In March 23, 1989 India closed all the trade and transit points except two, out of twenty two. The embargo unified the opposition against India and the king (Chadda, 2000:119).This Indian policy gave a good political and economic blow to the almost dead Panchayat. The freedom movement in Eastern Europe and the fall of Russian communism added fuel to the fire of Nepalese *Janaandolan* (people's mass movement). This international environment and support from India seemed to be an unbearable disaster to the Monarch supported by the Hindu and Buddhist theory of kingship. The history turned around. The Panchayat was overthrown. The conflict between the Monarchisms and people led parties' ended (in 1990). The second round of national level (Macro) conflict rests at this juncture of history, but, it is a pity that the conflict at the grass root level did not change much.

Hence, in 1990 a new form of constitutional parliamentary democracy started. We could see that the new political force emerging with different political ideology suffered internal dispute and lacked an inter-party collective vision for the country. Consequently, as mentioned earlier, people, especially those living in village and remote areas did not meet even the basic needs. There appeared a big gap between the poor in the villages and the rich in the town and cities. The per capita income went up but in reality there emerged a gulf, an unexpected gap between people. Not only that the spatial and the regional imbalances worsened. Ethnic groups were overlooked and gender was neglected. On this social, economic background a new radical group emerged in the name of pro-

communism in 1996. This marked the beginning of the third Macro level conflict in Nepal which still continues.

The new ideology of 'reformism' led by the extremist leftist party[4] the Communist Party of Nepal- Maoist (CPN-M) became active and flourished, no matter at what cost. In the state-Maoist conflict more than 12000 Nepalese have offered their lives. Now we see these two divergent identities State Vs Maoists playing a game of identity. Most of the rural areas and many districts are under Maoist control.[5] The state Vs Moist conflict has changed its forms in three different levels, i.e. at the time of inception of Nepalese People's War (NPW) it was state Vs Maoist in the second stage it turned into Palace (state) Parliamentary parties and Maiost (a triangular conflict) and at the moment particularly after Palace coup in Feb. 2005 the conflict has changed it's shape and power structure and has become bipolar i.e. Palace (the state) Vs Parliamentary parties and Maoist[6]. Such a dramatic political shift has intensified the situation. Therefore, the identity struggle between these forces is the major macro problem which is, to some extent affected by the internationalization of the situation.

It is crystal clear that there is a spatial and horizontal imbalance (Murshed and Gates 2003)[7] in Nepal in terms of development. Therefore, one can clearly see two groups. The one group is economically, socially, politically and culturally deprived and another

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[4] Ideologically CPN-M is extreme leftist party but they are becoming more liberal and trying to enter the parliamentary system for democratic practice. The recent Delhi agreement with other political parties for the sake of a grand political transformation is one of the citable examples of how they are becoming liberal.
[5] http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/3573402.stm
[6] For details see: http://nepalresearch.org/publications/keshabprasad_bhattarai_2006_02.pdf
[7] Paper presented for the UNU/WIDER project conference on *Spatial Inequality in Asia*, Tokyo, and March 28-29 March 2003.

privileged of all. This is the ground for the present political upheaval where Maoism emerged and has forced the people to think in a way wherein the old feudalistic socio-political structure can be replaced with "people centered system" which lets people exercise their rights. Such a political instability and a common discourse on the existing and unjust system have changed the former scenario in Nepali politics. The identification as 'terrorist' to CPN-M, as constructed by the governments further intensified the situation. The identity and the power game between these forces at the moment has become the major issue of national discussion.

GLOBALIZATION AND IDENTITY CONFLICT AT MICRO LEVEL

Society is always in the process of transformation. And formation of identity takes place accordingly both in the individual level and in group level simultaneously. While talking about identity, it would be worth mentioning Giddens(1991). He argues that the identity of self changes during the course of modernization and therefore society on a broader scale has to attempt **'**re-*skilling'* of the existing identity of self in order to match modernity. Modernization is a part of globalization and it can not be avoided. Therefore, identity conflict, on this background, seems to be a natural phenomenon taking place at different levels as per time and place.

Identity, however, is not merely an internal awareness of self; it also has to do with an assertion of this self to those who are perceived as being outside this self (Kapadia 2002:63). Nepal is facing conflict not only at the state level but also in micro level because of the growing awareness of ethnicity and cultural values. This has been further

supported by the gradual but slow increment in literacy, the development in tourism, expansion in labour market, easy access to media, the growing awareness on gender and education.

Some minor ethnic conflicts in Nepalese context are not "inter-ethnic" rather I would say it could be characterized as conflict between state Vs ethnic groups. The reason is that the ethnic groups are in search of their identity and are struggling for recognition from the state. This is one important point one can notice in Nepalese context. The Hindu domination and basically feudalistic social structure has been questioned in economical, political as well as cultural ground though not to a large extent yet. It has given a possibility for're-thinking' one's role and status in a society as a contributor and a constituent of the whole. The notion of Hindu kingdom and numerous ethnic identities surviving under Hindu domination has now been gradually changing. Therefore, there are many queries to be responded in a long run if not provided a respectable[8] space for the "others" by Hinduism.

The dalit movement in Nepal is not just a class problem but has become a distinct humanitarian problem. The biggest problem of the Dalits now is inhumane caste discrimination and untouchability[9].Such movements have gained a high attention in the country wherein people are trying to find a proper identity as a citizen without any discrimination. The restriction for entrance in temples to dalits by the upper castes is one

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[8] By saying *respectable* I mean that each and every thing is a part of the whole whatever negative or positive or good or bad. It is our conception and finally experiences and perceives something good or bad. Hence, the 'others' in the whole is the product of the whole itself which emerge to contribute the whole in one or the other way.

[9] http://www.msnepal.org/reports_pubs/ekchhin/2003_issue2/05.htm

of the possible grounds for new identity search. Such a clash between Brahmans, Kshetriyas and so called untouchables has created a forum for public discourse. This has been possible because of the accessibility of information, rising awareness and global influence of secular movements and rising notion of "casteless society". This is a problem within religion not between religions However; this is just a beginning .One as a social scientist needs to look at how will it end?

Nepal has not experienced that much inter-religious conflict so far, as it had happened and normally is experienced in India. The reason is that there are not other competing religions to Hindu and also the notion of religious and cultural brotherhood is prominent among the heterogeneity of culture and religion in Nepal.

Nepal presently has 120 live languages and around 61 nationalities (ethnic groups). Among such heterogeneity within a small country, the impact of globalization is intense. The ethnic groups have started searching for their ethnic values. The 1991 census showed that for the first time since 1961 the numbers of Nepali speaker declined. More Nepalese claimed another language as their primary language in 1991(Chadda, 2000:136). This is a clear evidence of growing awareness of ethnicity and consequence and the impact of globalization wherein people either in a group or in individual are in search of their proper identity. A notable example is that the new policy will permit use of particular language for education provided that it has achieved a certain level of development. Nepali as the only language of national broadcasting has been replaced with many other

local languages which are major consequence of globalization and identity search in micro level after 1990s.

EMERGENCE OF NEPALESE CIVIL SOCITY AND THE QUESTION OF IDENTITY

The concept of civil society is vague and it is so because of the degree of political modernity undertaking in different societies. However, civil society is a 'natural society' (Kaviraj, 2002) and does have close relation to state. Politics and civil societies are two distinct aspects but do contribute each other to a large extent. The continuous changing nature of society guides people and helps to develop a notion of confrontation and comparison in the cognitive level which is revealed in the individual's behavior, in social activities and gradually at national level. Globalization, therefore, has been a good tool to enhance possibility for "choice".

Though free from colonialism, Nepal remained exploited and ruled by anarchism for a long time. Therefore, the society was dominated by non democrats. Civil society remained almost extinct (in terms of democratic interaction). This situation inspired and played a vital role in support of the elites. Hence, in whatever form the civil society existed, it could not act against the autocracy for some time. The growing political awareness and change just after 1950s and especially after 1990s has remarkably contributed in the emergence of the concept of civil society in a true sense. During the period 1950s through 1996 the politician, upper middle class and business sector people

made a good progress. Where as a big mass of underprivileged groups were in search of civic and ethnic identity.

In case of India, as Metcalf and Metcalf (2002:144) argue the issues like female literacy, the age of marriage(which particularly affected girls since they were married younger), the opportunity of widows to remarry and in case of Muslim, the practice of polygamy was highly revalued in the later 19th century. The 1990s historical political wave had a substantial influence in Nepal. The major contribution of this historical step is the foundation of numerous non governmental organizations. As a result, mushrooming NGOs after 1990s has generated background for public discourse on the importance of civil society. Therefore, concept of civil society in Nepal is a very new phenomenon. In case of India, as Ludden(2000) says, the elites along with teachers were urged by the imperial authority to participate in the identity definition which was supposed to be the base of an invented native society. The case of Nepal too, it was not that different. The Pundits and elites were playing a constructive part in the identity definition. In contrary, the social project of identity construction was led by NGOs after 90s. This is definitely a contribution of globalization!!

Remarkably, this examination gives a picture that gender is the most affected aspect with the emergence of civil society and awareness achieved by people in this matter. The role of female has been dramatically re-constructed in politics, civil society and in administration. The concept, "women are good *grihalaxmis* (housewives) and that the

house is their world"[10] has changed with the flow of female in the labor market, substantial participation in social activities and politics. Founding of numerous women organization and the establishment of women and child ministry is one of the good examples to be cited as a revolutionary change in case of gender. There are hundreds of local mother groups in almost every district. To me, it is a noteworthy development in terms gender identity construction. However, the old social epistemology on gender has changed and has opened up a door for female to exhibit their role in respective societies in order to explore their talents and potential. This shows that the post 90s is the time for gender value transformation in Nepal. Nepali society where female had less access in the civil society, presently have increased "role" and "responsibility". This is the consequences of the global link

The focus on female education is another major step taken which has also added an inspiration and opportunity to female in order to find a proper social identity in the changing context. Access to higher education, changing role in family and society, changed status in politics and civil society and leading role in women movement/ organizations have changed female behavior and has helped to draw new identity.

Finally, I would like to say that present development of treating civil society as a separate but important entity for the development of democratic system is the contribution of globalization and the process of identity search wherein gender issue has been highly emphasized and the women's emancipation from patriarchal domination is at the apex.

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[10] http://www.gefont.org/research/women/html/part_1.htm

CIVIL SOCIETY AS A FRAME WORK

From the discussion above it can be argued that there is inseparable link between civil society, politics, private sector and development. In fact, civil society is a very complex phenomenon; therefore, can be categorized in different groups as Varshney (2001) talks.

However, it would be an essential step to look at civil society and its structure in order to better understand society and social transition as a whole. As we see, Nepal is a multi ethnic, multicultural and multi lingual country where the civil society seems to be more complex and dominant in politics, economy or religious activities.

Therefore, for a research purpose either in politics, religion, economic or social phenomena; it seems important to take an account of civil society as a reference.

CONCLUSION

Globalization is not an end in itself; rather it is a process that enhances possibility for change and at times forces for change. The world has been a small global village because of the rapid development in communication and transportation which has made things easily accessible. Different schools of thought have given different views about globalization. For example, one historical school of thought, in the Indian context, portrays colonial rule not as an imposition but as an Indian project or as form of dialogue

between the Indians and the British (Bayly 1988, 1998)[11]. This argument, from the

discussion above can be further supported. Though not colonized, Nepal has had a good

experience of globalization and its impact in civil society and identity construction.

The role of gender in political and civil society has come in to the frontline public

discourse which, to some extent is a positive sign of social transformation and building

democratic notion in every aspect of society. Hence, globalization has contributed to raise

awareness in gender issues though there are many undesired results as well. It has

contributed in the sense that people have inspiration to develop a new value on gender,

politics and development. Finally, in a sense, the ongoing Nepalese People's War (NPW)

is a part and process of social transformation and definitely a parcel of globalization.

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[11] Cf. (Veer, 2002:174 Religion in South Asia. Research Center for Religion and society, University of Amsterdam. Annual Rev. Anthropology 2002.31.173-87