



Contents lists available at [SciVerse ScienceDirect](http://www.sciencedirect.com)

International Journal of Educational Development

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/ijedudev



Post-conflict identity crisis in Nepal: Implications for educational reforms

Tejendra Pherali^{a,*}, Dean Garratt^b

^a Liverpool John Moores University, United Kingdom

^b University of Chester, United Kingdom

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Nepal
Identity
Conflict
Educational reconstruction
Language
Politics

ABSTRACT

This paper is concerned with exploring tensions of national identity, as played out in the evolving context of post accord transitional politics in Nepal. Drawing on a qualitative study of empirical research, situated at the nexus of education and violent conflict in Nepal, the paper employs close observations of recent social and political movements, especially the rise of ethnic politics following the peace agreement in 2006, and further analyses the historical antecedents aiming to create a unified national identity through language and education. It argues that educational reconstruction must deal with the notion of identity as part of a measured process to correct the legacy of ethnic, linguistic and caste-based marginalisation in Nepal.

© 2013 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Scene 1:

A pahade¹ hawker knocks on the gate of Kathmandu city's house with strawberries in his traditional hilly basket. The landlady asks: *Dai kafal kasari ho?* [Elder brother, what rate are the strawberries?]
Pahade hawker: *Bis ruppe mana ho bainee.* [Twenty rupees per *mana*,² younger sister.]
The landlady: *Bis ta mango bhayena ra dai? Milayera dinus na?* [Isn't twenty expensive, elder brother? Could you consider the price please?]

Scene 2:

A Madhesi hawker shouts outside the gate – *Ye ... Aalu, kauli, ramtoria, tamator...* [Potatoes, cauliflowers, ladyfingers, tomatoes ...]
The same landlady asks: *Ye madhise golbheda kasari ho?* [Hey Madhesi, how much are the tomatoes?]
Madhesi³ hawker: *Hajur... kilo ko dus rupaiya parchha hajur* [My lady, ten rupees per kilo madam.]
The landlady: *Kati mango, ali sasto de.* [That's expensive. Make it cheaper!]

1. Background

The above two scenes can be read as textual and linguistic representations and political allegories of the negative attitudes of Kathmandu city dwellers towards impoverished 'hawkers' in Nepal. They also depict the tensions between two prominent ethnic groups in contemporary Nepali society: *Pahade* and *Madhesi*. In this paper, we suggest such prejudice is not uncommon among the many different castes and indigenous groups of Nepal. It is rather a typical reflection on culture, and of the mindset of socially and politically privileged classes (living in the hills) towards people of the fertile southern plains (Terai/Madhes). Against this backdrop, we argue it is the persistent negligence and symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1977⁴) of the state against the many marginalised castes and ethnic communities, which creates a timely intervention for oppressed groups to rebel violently against Nepal's political system. This, we suggest, has serious implications for notions of national identity and citizenship, as well as the critical role of education in producing social and political change in the era of post-war transitional politics. The analysis here primarily focuses on the context of Nepali society but also provides useful insights into similar post-conflict scenarios in other regions where post-conflict educational reconstruction and peacebuilding face significant challenges: for example, those widely publicised by the recent Global Monitoring Report on the impact of armed conflicts on educational processes in conflict-affected societies (UNESCO, 2011). Before developing our analysis of Nepal's education system, we reflect briefly upon the political

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +44 151 231 5485.

E-mail addresses: t.pherali@ljmu.ac.uk, pherali@hotmail.com (T. Pherali), d.garratt@chester.ac.uk (D. Garratt).

¹ A hawker is a person of hilly or mountainous origin.

² This is a traditional Nepali measurement system, in which measurements are made in quantity and not in weight – 7 *mana* = 1 *pathee*.

³ A hawker of Southern Plains origin.

⁴ The term symbolic violence is coined by Bourdieu to describe how particular forms of linguistic competence, in this case the process of learning Nepali, can become a signifier of domination over those for whom there appears no alternative choice. The dominant language is thus acquired as a form of misrecognition, a gentle violence that is unwittingly chosen as much as it is enforced.

antecedents that create a context for writing about education, identity and conflict in Nepal.

In February 1996, the then Communist Party of Nepal [Maoist] [CPN-M] announced a 'People's War' in Nepal, with the aim of overthrowing the constitutional monarchy and establishing 'a new socio-economic structure and state' (Bhattarai, 2003; Maoist Statements and Documents, 2003). The ensuing conflict spread rapidly across the country as a consequence of failing to respond to longstanding social inequality (Murshed and Gates, 2005), abject poverty and deprivation (Deraniyagala, 2005; Bhattarai, 2003; Do and Iyer, 2007), and the lack of insights into, or political will to deal with the rising insurgency through peaceful means (Thapa and Sijapati, 2004; Bohara et al., 2006). Over 17,000 people were killed by the war, before the *Comprehensive Peace Accord* (CPA) was eventually signed between the Government of Nepal and the CPN-M in November 2006. However, while the 'People's War' emerged in the context of widespread public dissatisfaction – (generated by several post-Panchayat [1990] governments), it also surfaced in response to deep and historically embedded socio-economic divisions. In the last thirteen years, Nepal has suffered a significant loss in social and political stability, resulting in a breakdown or malfunctioning of state institutions and leading to a gradual decline of public trust towards state functionality. Yet ironically such marked political change has led also to improved public participation, where historically suppressed castes have begun to challenge the state's dominance.

Throughout, we reflect on the 'People's War' in Nepal to examine the recent crisis of identity among the multi-ethnic and indigenous populations. In the midst of a rebellion against state nationalism and in response to a profound rupturing of Nepali tradition, the tensions of identity formation in the context of an evolving state are examined. Here we employ the frame of post-accord transitional politics to examine the concept of national identity, and also critically consider the implications of change for education (as a process of identity formation and linguistic acquisition) and society. The analysis reveals tensions between embedded notions of 'national unity', on the one hand and the political 'fragmentation' of the state, on the other, as new communities, identities and political affiliations continue to emerge and conflate in the post-accord era. We argue such tensions serve to undermine the significance of national identity and contend that a more rigorous and critical debate is required to identify ways in which difference and diversity within 'Nepali' identity and citizenship may be usefully reconstructed through education and peace building.

This paper is structured in three main sections: firstly, we critique the process of educational development in Nepal from an ethnic/caste perspective. Then, the following section presents an historico-political analysis of education in the process of creating national identity and its relevance to the advent and growth of the 'People's War'. Finally, we discuss the dilemma of preserving, reinventing or deconstructing the notion of 'national unity' in post-conflict political developments, primarily focusing on the possibilities for educational reconstruction in post-conflict Nepal.

2. Ethnic diversity and educational development in Nepal

The evolving historical landscape of Nepal, reflected through its diverse ethnic and multicultural traditions, was perhaps first recognised by King Prithvi Narayan Shah (1723–1775), who annexed between twenty-two and twenty four different principalities and ethnic-based territories. Following the national unification campaign, he proclaimed that '*Nepal char jat chhatis varna ko fulbari ho*' [Nepal is a garden of four castes and thirty-six sub-castes.]. The *Muluki Ain* (National Code) was formally introduced in 1854 to regulate caste relations as a legal system

within Nepali society, until the caste system was abolished in 1963 by the *Naya Muluki Ain* (New National Code), which prohibited caste-based discrimination (Shields and Rappleye, 2008b: p. 266), although in reality social inequality persisted as upper caste groups continued to monopolise social and political institutions (Lawoti, 2005). Today, such diversity is manifested through multiple forms of ethnicity, caste/race, language, religion, society and culture.⁵ Historically, in terms of 'race', two different groups have dwelled in Nepal: Mongoloid and Caucasian. Dwelling in the mountainous terrains, Mongoloids are culturally close to Tibetans, whereas Caucasians reside much closer to the people of the Indo-Gangetic plains (Bhattachan and Pyakuryal, 1996: p. 18). The high castes living in the hills (e.g. Brahmins, Chhetris and Newars), have connections to royalty and for centuries have enjoyed many state privileges, while the *Dalits* (treated as untouchable), indigenous nationalities known as *Janajatis* (indigenous nationalities, e.g. Bhutia, Thakali, Magars, Limbus, Tharus, Dhimals, etc.) and *Madhesis* (ethnic groups dwelling in the Terai/Madhes) have experienced deprivation and a lack of opportunity (Pandey, 2010; Lawoti, 2005). However, the rupturing of the traditional power relations between various social groups during the armed conflict as well as the increasing tensions between such groups after the CPA have produced a partial redistribution of resources and access to power.

Nepal is home to over one hundred ethnic and more than seventy linguistic communities (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2003). Yet in the presence of such multi-lingual groups and castes, the state has promoted the Nepali language *de facto* as the *lingua franca*: that which represents the prevailing orthodoxy or *doxa* (Bourdieu, 1977). However, the dominant view among ethnic and indigenous nationalities is that this is an act of 'symbolic violence' by the state, under the rule and influence of high caste elite groups. For Bourdieu (1977), this is where particular forms of linguistic competence, realised through a national language, are strategically employed to dominate and suppress difference and diversity, and further obscure indigenous languages. The promulgation of *Rastrabhasha* (national language) has somewhat damagingly promoted a single identity, language and culture, while ensuring the widespread dissemination of orthodox knowledge through a heavily prescribed curriculum. Without exception, all former regimes of Nepal – the Shah Kings (1768–1845), the Ranas (1846–1950), the *Panchas* (1960–1990) and the parliamentary party leaders (1951–1959 and 1990–2006) – have promoted 'a homogeneous, monolithic and unitary state by sanctioning and promoting only one language (Nepali), one caste group (Hill Brahmin and Chhetri) and one religion (Hinduism)' (Hachhethu et al., 2008: p. 4). Educational structures including policies, bureaucracy and practice have historically played a complicit role in this process and still portray an uneven distribution of socioeconomic outcomes, perpetuating 'horizontal inequalities' in terms of caste, gender and ethnicity (Stewart, 2000; Tiwari, 2010).

2.1. Educational history: analysis and critique

Nepal's education system has a history of just over six decades. The end of the Rana oligarchy in 1951 and beginning of a more egalitarian regime provided universal access to education, which

⁵ We are fully aware of the tensions inherent to the concept of 'race' and its interchangeable status with ethnicity. For example, Miles (1993) and Mason (2006), have argued independently that 'race' can be regarded as a naturalising concept, which is socially, culturally and politically corrosive, as in the case of high and low 'caste' in Nepal. For this reason, though we cannot avoid using both terms at different times, in part because of the historical antecedents of Nepal as a caste-based society, we prefer the term ethnicity as a more accurate representation of cultural difference and diversity existing between indigenous communities.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6841437>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6841437>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)