THE MAOISTS AND MINORITIES:
OVERLAP OF INTERESTS OR
A CASE OF EXPLOITATION?

Mahendra Lawoti

Introduction
The Communist Party of Nepal (CPN)-Maoist insurgency, waged since February 13, 1996, has declared support for many demands of the indigenous nationalities (adivasi janajati), dalit, women, and other oppressed groups, including the right to self-determination, secular state, equality among native Nepali languages, cultural autonomy, and socioeconomic and gender equality. Reports from the insurgency areas by journalists, photographs published in the newspapers, and lists of people killed during the insurgency attest to the high participation of indigenous nationalities, dalit and women (Onesto 1999; Bhattachan 2000; Maharjan 2000; Lama 2001). Recent ethnographic studies have corroborated the high involvement of various indigenous nationalities in the insurgency (Pettigrew 2003; de Sales 2003; Shneiderman and Turin forthcoming).

However, despite the positive facade of the Maoists toward the indigenous nationalities' cause, some indigenous-nationalities activists and leaders, especially those associated with formal ethnic associations, are wary of the overall Maoist game plan. They suspect that the Maoists are putting up a positive facade to lure the minorities into the insurgency. The Nepal Magar Sangh (association) passed a resolution at its 1998 annual convention that urged the Maoists and the government not to get Magars killed in the name of the Peoples War (INSEC 1999: 133). Likewise, ethnic party leaders who have worked with the Maoists point to the Maoists' attempt to subordinate their causes and organizations.1

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1 This paper was first prepared in October 2001. The final revision was made in October 2003. The major analysis remains the same; some data and facts have been updated. I thank Susan Hagen, Pratyusha Onda, Selma Sonntag, Mark Turin, and anonymous reviewers for helpful comments on earlier drafts.

2 See interview with Gopal Khambu, leader of the Khambuwan National Front, in Khambu (2001). At the time, he had broken off his organization's alliance with the Maoists; he aligned with the Maoists again, reportedly after the Royal Palace massacre in June. Nepalnews.com reported on September 6,
this scenario of conflicting attitudes of marginalized social groups toward the Maoists, what is the Maoist attitude? Are the Maoists raising minority issues as a strategy to exploit the grievances of minorities against the state? Or do they empathize with minority causes?

In an absence of a better terminology, I refer to the socio-culturally oppressed groups 'minorities': indigenous nationalities, *dalit*, *madhesi*, and women. My criterion for defining minorities in Nepal is not based on numeric strength. The numeric criterion is problematic because even the dominant group is a minority demographically. I refer to the groups marginalized in cultural realm and/or in accessing societal and state resources as minorities. The group with an overwhelming dominance in the two realms is the dominant group. Needless to say, exceptions (such as a few rich *dalit* or indigenous nationalities among the generally poor population) make the rules. According to this criterion, the caste-hill-Hindu-elite males (CHHEM), who constitute approximately 15.5 per cent of population, are the dominant group whereas the rest of the population, nearing 85 per cent, divided into ethnic/caste, religious, regional, and gender groups, are the minorities.

2003 that the Kirat Worker's Party, an organization established with the merger of the Khumbu National Front and the Limbuwa National Liberation Front, has broken off with the Maoists, charging the Maoists of "neglecting of agreements."

3 A SINHAS reviewer with Marxist orientation objected to the use of the term minority, claiming that it was a 'plastic phantom' category that was problematic because, among other things, there are rich and poor minorities. However, we should not forget that whether indigenous nationalities are rich or poor, all face cultural discrimination. The rich *dalit* is still denied entrance to many temples simply because he or she was born as a *dalit*. Marxists prefer to call nationalism as imagined communities, as Benedict Anderson (1991) did, but we can use the same criterion and say that 'class' is even more an imagined concept or plastic phantom term. In fact, class has not even reached the category of a community! The poor in the US hardly empathize with the poor in Nepal whereas the poor and rich in the US and Nepal identify themselves as American or Nepali nationals respectively.

4 I use the term resources to broadly cover material well-being, political positions, and influence. See Lawoti 2002 for further elaboration on definitional terms in the context of minorities.

5 15.5 percent is half of the CHHE (Bahun, Ksetri, Thakuri and Sanyasi) population. The female population has been deducted. CHHE designates the dominant group with females included. The dominant group is the largest single linguistic-ethnic-social group. According to the 2001 census, the CHHE is 30.89%, indigenous nationalities 36.31%, *dalit* 14.99%, and *madhesi* (excluding indigenous nationalities and dalit) 16.59% of the population. The minorities, however, contest the census, charging that it undercounts them (Bhattachan 2003).

This essay will not deal with the question of whether the Maoist insurgency is desirable and necessary for changing an under-developed society, and whether it will succeed or fail in its goal of forming a 'new peoples' democratic republic, or rather ebb away. Nor will it discuss appropriateness of violence as a medium of social change. This paper simply accepts that the Maoist insurgency is a reality in Nepal deeply affecting society, including the minorities. Based on this assumption, the essay will explore the apparent overlap or conflict of interests between the Maoists' and minorities.

Academic writings on the Maoist insurgency are few. A number of reports have been prepared on the involvement of women and indigenous nationalities but they are mostly descriptive and journalistic in nature. Neupane (2001) and Maharaj (2000) have provided introductory accounts with the latter briefly discussing relationships between the ethnic groups and the Maoists. Bhattachan (2000) also touches on the relationships between the disadvantaged groups and the Maoist insurgency in his paper on the possibility of ethnic insurgency in Nepal. 2003 has seen a number of volumes on the insurgency but only a few articles look at the relationship between the Maoist and minorities. Some of the book chapters contain ethnographic studies that discuss the involvement of indigenous nationalities in the insurgency and its consequences to them (Sheeiderman and Turin forthcoming; Pettigrew 2003; de Sales 2003). These studies look at only single ethnic group and/or a particular area or region. Studies on the involvement of and consequences toward the *dalit* and the *madhesi* are rare, on the other hand, if not absent. Further, no work has attempted to compare the varying involvement of groups or look at the impact across groups. If the Maoists are working for the betterment of the oppressed socio-cultural groups, as they claim, then it will be helpful to see how they have impacted different oppressed groups. Additionally, comparison of groups may shed light on the insurgency's priorities, impact, and its consequences on the society. Thus, this article attempts to compare the differential impacts of insurgency on the disadvantaged socio-cultural groups. In addition, this article explicitly investigates whether the raising
of the minority issues by the Maoist is strategic or due to empathy. A few work (Shneiderman and Turin forthcoming; de Sales 2003) touch on the theme but either only tentatively or with a particular group.

I will look at aggregate data available, secondary literatures, perspectives of minority activists, attitudes of the Maoist party toward minority issues (declarations and publications; leaders' speeches, interviews, and writings; party ideology and values; and historical position of the party) and the party's performance on minority issues. While analyzing the intentions of the Maoists, I will mostly focus on the case of the indigenous nationalities because more literature and data is available on them.

Methodological Issues in Studying the Maoist Insurgency

There are a number of difficulties in analyzing the Maoist insurgency. A small extreme left party of pre-1996 days has grown into an outfit that has come to dominate the national political agenda. It has gone through a dramatic evolution in the last eight years in terms of size, influence, and impact. Continuous and rapid changes in the insurgency make it tough to pin it down as an entity for discussion. We are discussing a political party/movement/insurgency that is evolving as I write. It is involved in activities and events, the failure or success of which may transform it considerably from what it is, and how it is perceived. Some of what is written based on information currently available may become irrelevant after a short while.

Second, the problem is compounded by the Maoist's contradictory and complex positions on a number of issues. Perhaps the underground nature of the insurgency is responsible for some of this ambivalence. For instance, the Maoists are generally thought to be a republican outfit. However, some commentators in Nepal have alleged them to be in touch with the palace. The Maoist's claim, after the royal family massacre, of having a minimum understanding based on 'patriotic nationalism' with the late king Birendra provided support to the allegation. Such contradictory signals create confusion as to their real positions on issues such as republicanism. Some analysts believe that the Maoists are deliberately creating confusion by putting forth contradictory positions.

Such contradictory positions make analyzing them difficult. It sometimes gives credence to charges leveled against them of having secret understanding with different political forces and credence to questions of their commitment toward different issues, including sincerity toward minority issues.

Third, most of the public information about the insurgency has come through journalists. However, most of the journalists have been allowed by Maoists to visit the restricted Maoist areas over a limited period of time. The Maoists may have exposed the journalists to what they wanted to show. The journalists close to the Maoists have enjoyed more freedom and access, and they have produced detailed works but such reports inevitably contain considerable propaganda elements in them (Onesto 1999; Janadesh Weekly 2058 v.s.). These problems of valid and reliable data create difficulties in analyzing the insurgency.

The Involvement of Minorities in the Insurgency

Ethnographic studies have shown a high level of participation of some of the indigenous nationalities such as the Tamu mai/Gurung, Kham-Magar, and Thangmi (Petigrew 2003; de Sales 2003; Shneiderman and Turin forthcoming). Recent reports on women's involvement also claim a high level of women's participation in the insurgency. At the time of finalization of this article, this author had not come across academic observations that describe the involvement of dalit and madhesi. Journalistic accounts have claimed a high level of dalit participation. Conversations with the leaders of the mainstream dalit movements corroborate the journalistic accounts. A central level leftist dalit leader told me in 2001 that some of his organization's district office bearers had joined the insurgency. With regard to the madhesi, information is even more rare. This is partly because the insurgency spread to the Terai at a much later period. The Maoists attacked the police and government buildings in the Terai in a large-scale manner only after the breakdown of the first cease-fire in November 2001.

It is almost impossible to get accurate data on the participation of different socio-cultural groups in insurgencies because by definition the activities are not above the ground and transparent. In the absence of data on the involvement of various socio-cultural groups in the Maoist

6 See Bhattarai 2001. The Kathmandu Post of September 18, 2003 reports that the Maoists have constructed the statues of the late King Birendra, Queen Aishwarya, and Crown Prince Dipendra in Kalikot, a remote district (Pandey 2003).

7 In fact, in some cases they guided the journalists, such as Onesto (1999), for a considerable period of time throughout the insurgency-affected areas to exhibit their activities and achievements.
### Table 1: Casualties in the Maoist Insurgency by Ethnic/Caste Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Caste/Caste (%)</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Woman</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Total (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brahmin</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>50 (42)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thakur</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>50 (43)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cham (A)</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>50 (41)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>466</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>248</td>
<td>50 (42)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>466</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>248</td>
<td>50 (42)</td>
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</table>

### Table 2: Numbers of Casualties by Religion in 1999-2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Woman</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Total (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hindu Muslims</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>50 (42)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sikh</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>50 (43)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jain</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>50 (45)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>351</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>50 (44)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Bihar Police (2000-01) & Bihar Police (2000-01)

2001, the Maoists killed more people than the police (Maharashtra 2000).

Since 1999, all the data are of the state of Maharashtra in November.
movement, I will use the data published in the magazine Ekkāisa Satabāt as adapted in Bhattachan (2000), of people killed during the course of the insurgency as an indicator of involvement of different minority groups (see Table 1). Bystanders and non-cadres might be included in the list. But unless it is shown that the bystanders killed belong to ethnic/caste groups different from those generally killed, perhaps as result of some unique reason, it is safe to assume that the killings of the bystanders reflect the general trend. The data meets the cross-verification from different angles fairly well. For instance, the conflict has mostly occurred in the hills. Less madhesī in the list suggest that it reflects the reality in that respect. Since the conflict has taken place in the Magarāī region, higher number of Magars in the list of those killed also suggests that the data is not invalid in that respect.

There might be some groups whose participation is high but are not killed in high numbers. If that is the case, in terms of minorities, it will suggest two things. First, if minorities are generally killed less than their actual participation, then it would suggest that their participation is higher in reality. On the other hand, if minorities are generally killed more than their actual proportion of participation, it would support the view that the minorities are being exploited. An indigenous nationalities activist, who worked as a communist student cadre, alleged in a public presentation at Martin Chautari in the mid nineties that indigenous nationalities cadres were sent to remote areas for regular work but used to be called to Kathmandu when fights broke out between student groups. He claimed that the 'upper caste' cadres did not turn up during those fights. If a similar trend of sending the minorities more often to battlefields exists in the Maoist insurgency, the participation of the indigenous nationalities may be less than that shown by the data of people killed during the insurgency. However, it is beyond the scope of this article to verify such trends, if any. The assumption is that there might be some gaps in the data but that it is not a very significant one.

If we assume that the police generally kill Maoists, suspected Maoists, Maoists sympathizers, or even innocent people, who have higher chances of becoming sympathizers if not activists, the data confirms the high participation of indigenous nationalities (particularly Magars), dalit, and women in the insurgency. Ethnographic studies have established the high involvement of indigenous nationalities, such as the Kham-Magar (de Sales 2003), Gurung (Petitgrew 2003), and Thangmi (Shneiderman and Turin forthcoming). The data on the Maoists killed by the police corroborate the ethnographic studies that have recorded the involvement of indigenous nationalities, especially the Magar. Till the period covered by this data (February 2000), the police have killed indigenous nationalities the most (33.2 percent).

The police have not killed the madhesī, except for the Tharus, in significant numbers. This indicates a low level of madhesī participation till the period covered by the data. Since the violent conflicts generally occurred in the hills during the period covered by the data, the less number of madhesī killed till October 2000 is not surprising. Reports of the Maoists being killed in the Tarai regions by local people even before the first peace talks, after which similar incidents were reported in the mid and eastern hills, also indicate earlier problems of penetration faced by the Maoists in the Tarai (Kathmandu Post 2001). Sporadic resistances against the Maoists by madhesī have been reported by newspapers ever since. Onesto (1999) also reports of resistance toward the Maoists in Chitwan. Even though the Maoists formed the Madhesī Liberation Front, the Maoists presence in the Tarai was not as strong as in the hills in the earlier years.

The third round of government-Maoist parleys during the second cease-fire, held in Harpur, a Maoist stronghold in Dang in the western Tarai, has shown that by 2003 the Maoists had strengthened their hold in

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9 Neupane (2001) provides a partial list of people killed by the government. His list includes a high number of indigenous nationalities, dalit, and women. However, he has not categorized the dead persons into ethnic/caste groups. INSEC (1999: 139) has data on ethnic/caste categories up to the period ending 1998. Persons killed in each ethnic/caste category are less than the data used here covering up to 2000. The data used here does not contradict minority involvement trends observed in other published data.

10 The possibility for the higher involvement of the indigenous nationalities (and other minorities for that matter) exist because a large percentage (31.7%) of those killed by the police is unidentified.

11 The Tarai indigenous nationalities are included in the indigenous nationalities count instead of madhesī.

12 The communist parties in Nepal generally espouse a high nationalistic rhetoric based on anti-India posturing, and the popular perception of the madhesī as Indians among hill people, who dominate the communist parties, have sometimes created tensions between the madhesī and communists, including the Maoists.
some Tarai areas. In the earlier cease-fire, the Maoists wanted to hold some of the parlays in Rolpa and Rukum, their hill strongholds. That indicated that the Maoists did not consider any Tarai district as their stronghold till then. If they considered some Tarai districts their stronghold at that time, they would probably have proposed the earlier meeting in the Tarai, which is relatively accessible and closer to the Indian border for making escape exits, if necessary. The demands of the Maoist victims to be resettled in Kailali and other Tarai districts indicate that Maoist victims also considered the Tarai to be safe before 2000. However, the Maoists have strengthened their hold in the Tarai since then. The murder of police personnel in civil dress in broad daylight in the eastern Tarai, the attacks on the police and government offices, and the extradition of madhesi Maoists captured by the Indian government attest to increasing insurgent activities in the Tarai as well as some involvement of the madhesi.13 It will be interesting to find out the major participants in the insurgency in the Tarai, and whether these activities are concentrated in the settlements of the hill migrants or in the madhesi communities. Some newspapers have reported that support for the Maoists in the western Tarai is high among the Tharus, a madhesi indigenous nationalities group but the subject has not yet been analyzed thoroughly.

The dalit killed by the police is 7.3 percent (see Fig. 1). It is double the proportion of dalit killed by the Maoists, slightly less than their population proportion. It suggests that the involvement of the dalit in the insurgency is not insignificant. Though ethnographic study of dalit involvement is not yet available, mainstream dalit leaders say that dalit participation is considerable in the insurgency. The district level governments formed by the Maoists include names of dalit leaders. Thus, the participation of dalit is considerable but it may not be as high as that of the indigenous nationalities. However, for a group, which is socially excluded, even the comparatively lower participation is significant.

12 percent of the Maoists killed by the police are women. The absolute number (96 out of 702) is also significant. It is a high proportion if we analyze it in the context of women’s participation in public affairs in Nepal. Traditionally women are not involved in public spheres or violent public activities. The data, however, does not corroborate the estimates of some observers. Pettigrew (2003) estimated 30-40 percent of the Maoist cadres being women. The chairperson of the Nepal Women’s Commission, Dr. Durga Ghimire, who visited many districts after she was appointed the chairperson, claims that on an average 40 percent of Maoist militia, the trained division, consists of women (Himalayan Times 2003b). The estimations of the women’s involvement by observers seem to be based on impressionistic observations. As it is unusual to see women involved in public affairs, let alone insurgency, it may not be unusual to get an impression of very high involvement when the involvement is only high. A high participation of women during the Maoist cultural programs may have also contributed in creating such impressions among some observers. However, high participation of women in cultural programs in rural areas is a regular feature in non-Maoist events as well, as it is often the only few mass entertainment events available to them.

30-40 percent women’s participation is really a high involvement of women in insurceries even in a worldwide perspective. For that to occur, every third insurgent would have to be a woman. As reports from the Maoist strongholds also say that mostly women remain in the villages to look after the farm, children, and the old, it means that nearly every household would have at least a woman left behind whereas all the male members can be involved in the insurgency. Thus, it is unlikely that 30-40 percentages of Maoist cadres/militia are women. On the other hand, the

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13 See Himalayan Times (2003b) for the report of The Nepal Human Rights Commission (NHRC) on the killings of plains cloth police personnel in Lahan, a Tarai town, by the Maoist.
involvement of women may be higher than 12 percent, the percentage of women killed. Perhaps, women are less involved in violent activities that lead to their being killed. That means the involvement of women as cadres/militia would be higher then that suggested by the percentage killed. Thus, the women’s involvement may be higher than 12 percent but perhaps less than 30-40 percent.

There is an indication of participation of indigenous nationalities and dalits in higher echelons of the leadership as well. Schreuder and Turin (forthcoming) say that the Maoist district government in Dolakha consisted of all 17 major ethnic groups of the district. Sharma (2002: 26) says that out of 23 district peoples’ governments formed by the Maoists, ethnicities and dalits led 17 of them. A Marxist intellectual and close Maoist-watcher says that there were 2 indigenous nationalities in the 11 member politburo (the rest belong to the CHHE) and 11 indigenous nationalities, 2 dalits, 6 madhesis, and 5 newars in the 45 - members central committee (remaining 21 belonging to the CHHE) in 2001.14 A partial list of top leaders of the Maoist, published in the Nepali magazine Himal Khabarpatrika (Sharma 2007 v.s.) includes minorities as well.

Among the various minority groups, the data of people killed till 2000 October shows that the participation of the indigenous nationalities is very high whereas the madhesi number the least. The participation of women is significant but it is not as high as some observers have claimed. On the other hand, even though the participation of dalits is significant, the data does not corroborate a very high level of dalit participation. However, we should be careful in interpreting the dalit case as the data may be not as reliable compared to madhesi and indigenous nationalities, as the latter groups can be identified by their physiques whereas dalits look and often have similar surnames as CHHE.

What does this comparative study indicate? It does support the thesis that griefed parties get involved in the insurgency. The indigenous nationalities, the group whose members have been killed by the police the most, suffer from both the dimensions of oppression: cultural discrimination as well as discrimination in accessing resources. The dalit may be the most excluded socio-economically but the majority of them (except madhesi dalits) do not face linguistic, religious, and cultural discrimination. On the other hand, Hindu madhesi do not face religious discrimination. As the insurgency has spread to other regions and the Tarai, the involvement of the madhesis and other groups has increased. However, this does not weaken the finding. The support of the indigenous nationalities was instrumental in the initiation of the insurgency and its expansion at crucial early phase when many wrote off the insurgency.

Some observers claim that minority participation in the current insurgency is not much different than their participation in previous political movements and revolutions. The difference this time however, is significant because the high participation of the groups is more or less accepted. Second, the explicit incorporation of minority demands in the policies and programs of the insurgency also indicates the importance of the insurgency that has attached to minority issues. Likewise, the establishment of different ethnic fronts by the Maoists also indicates a higher involvement of the indigenous nationalities in numbers as well as in programs and issues.

The involvement of the indigenous nationalities in the Maoist insurgency becomes more interesting if we look at worldwide Maoist and violent communist rebellions during and after the fourth quarter of the twentieth century. In India, the Naxalbari and other violent communist rebellions took place with the involvement of tribal people (Banerjee 1980). The Shining Path insurgency in Peru also received support from the indigenous peoples (Mallon 1998). Likewise, the Khmer Rouge “concentrated on promoting a peasant revolt among the ethnic minorities of Cambodia’s forests and mountains” (Gersony 2003: 84). Interestingly I have not come across a theorization that deals on the ethnic basis of the Maoist insurgencies and it is beyond the scope of this article to do that. I intend to address it elsewhere. Suffice it here to say that comparative analysis shows that the class based Maoist rebellions have seen considerable involvement of ethnic minorities.

Who are the People killed by the Maoist? Minorities in the Crossfire

The Maoists have killed members of the CHHE the most (nearly 60 percent). The data suggests that the group has suffered the most from the Maoist killings and cruelty. Does this mean that the Maoists have killed the minorities in less proportion? The Maoists have killed the members of indigenous nationalities in nearly equal proportion to their population and nearly in equal proportion to that killed by the police (32.51 percent and 33.2 percent respectively). The Magars, inhabitants of the mid-west,
account for a disproportionate share of those killed: 25.7 percent by the police and 21 percent by the Maoists as against their countrywide population of 7.2 percent. The Maoists have also killed a higher proportion of Newar, Tharu and Gurung in comparison to the proportion of these groups killed by the police.\(^15\) If the Maoists were pro-indigenous nationalities, the proportion of indigenous nationalities killed by the Maoists should have been insignificant, if not much lower. The indigenous nationalities are generally not the well-off group that fall into the category of the class enemy of the Maoists. However, the data clearly shows that the indigenous nationalities have suffered heavily from the Maoist hands as well.

The proportion of women killed by the Maoist is less than 3 percent. The proportion of the dalit (3.0%) killed by the Maoists is less than their population proportion. However, it is interesting to note that the Maoists have killed even the dalit in a significant proportion, despite the dalit belonging to the lowest strata in economic and social realm. The Maoists have killed some madhesi but the numbers are small, and the dead may be police personnel (till 1998 nearly half of those killed by the Maoists were police personnel).

The comparison among groups killed by the police and the Maoists reveal that the police have killed a lesser proportion of ‘upper-caste’ hill Hindus and higher proportion of dalit, indigenous nationalities and women. On the other hand, the Maoists have killed CHHE more than the police (59.6% against 27.8%). This may be partly explained by the fact that the CHHE make up the rich and feudal class. The data suggests that the government’s actions have comparably favored the CHHE group whereas the Maoists’ attitude towards them is not positive.

The indigenous nationalities are at the receiving end of the insurgency because both the Maoists and the police have killed them in high proportion. Why have the Maoists killed a high number of indigenous nationalities? Is it because significant numbers of the indigenous nationalities oppose them? Other relevant questions with regard to the participation of indigenous nationalities are: will the participation of the minorities remain high in the Maoist insurgency if the mainstream parties incorporate the minority demands and the polity begins to address them with substantial policy changes? What will happen if the minority social justice movements gain momentum and become more successful in getting concessions from the state? And, what will be the impact if ethnic insurgency gains momentum? Further research is needed to answer these questions.

Impact of the Maoist Insurgency on Minorities
The Maoists have supported and raised many of the minority issues. The most significant impact of the Maoist insurgency on the minorities is perhaps the recognition of some of the minority grievances and issues by the state, mainstream political parties, and dominant society. Despite lagging behind the ethnic parties, such as the Rastrilya Jannukti Party (RJP) and the Nepal Sadhavvana Party (NSP), the CPN-Maoists have raised ethnic issues the most vociferously among the non-ethnic parties (Neupane 2001; Gurung 1998).\(^16\) The airing of the minority issues and the high minority participation in the insurgency has forced the mainstream civil society, political parties, donor agencies, and the government to recognize the grievances of the minorities. The government that resisted awarding reservation to indigenous nationalities and dalit for the last 13 years brought forth the reservation policy for dalit, indigenous nationalities, and women before the third round of talk during the second ceasefire. Likewise, the major political parties that ignored demands of the minorities and did not amend a single Constitution article in 13 years have proposed to do so to make the state secular in 2003, a major demand of the minorities.

Minority issues probably received recognition from the government and dominant civil society because they might have perceived that more indigenous nationalities, women, and dalit may join the Maoist insurgency if ignored continuously. The historic and contemporary trends of apathy of the government and the dominant group toward the minorities makes it plausible to assume that they would not have recognized the minority issues if a growing alternate force had not espoused the minority causes. The Maoist insurgency may also have sensitized a section of the government and the dominant group by showing that violent conflicts, including ethnic, is possible in Nepal, which otherwise was popularly perceived and promoted as a peaceful country.

\(^{15}\) Due to small numbers we must be careful in drawing conclusion for the latter groups.

\(^{16}\) See the 40-points demands of the United Left Front (political front of the Maoists) to the government before it went underground (Maharjan 2000: 191-193; INSEC 1999) and Maoists ethnic policies published in Sankadhe Weekly (2058 v.s.).
In addition to incorporating indigenous nationalities' demands, the Maoists have formed a number of ethnic liberation fronts such as the Magar National Liberation Front, Tamang National Liberation Front, Tharuwan National Liberation Front, Tamu National Liberation Front, Newa Khala, and so on (Bhattachan 2000:149; Sharma 2002). The formal establishment of the fronts indicates the importance attached to the issues and groups. If the importance of these organizations continues within the Maoists’ game plan, the minority issues will not be completely ignored later on. However, the question is will they continue to remain as important to the party and leadership once the party attains power or leaves the insurgency path? Even if the leadership does not attach as much importance, the participation in the insurgency, with or without a clear ethnic consciousness has politicized a large segment of the minority population, perhaps as never before in Nepal. The politicized minorities can be expected to become aware and informed about their group grievances and may work to further their group causes and cultural aspirations.

The increased politicization and rising of mass consciousness in society, especially among rural women, has been another significant impact of the insurgency. Onesto (1999), of the international Maoist association Revolutionary International Movement (RIM), claims that women have been empowered through inheritance rights, prohibition of discriminatory practices (life-long mourning of husbands and the treatment of women as “untouchables” during menstruation) and arranged marriages, and punishment to sex offenders and polygamists. Even though Onesto’s claims have propaganda elements in them, attempts to carry out such activities are positive. The threat of force may have ensured their compliance to a higher degree. The Maoists claim that women’s participation in committees to run various aspects of village life, such as resolving disputes and quarrels, if true, may have brought more women into the public sphere. The absence of men in the village due to their involvement in the People’s War, or to escape Maoist recruitment or threat, or migration for seasonal works may have catalyzed some of these changes. On the other hand, critics have pointed out an increased burden on women by male family members’ deaths or participation in the insurgency (Lama 2057 v.s.). Even though the changes may not be as high as claimed by the Maoists, women carrying guns, fighting as guerrillas, traveling for long days away from home, engaging in politics, and mixing with non-relatives males signify significant changes in gender relations, more so among the CHHE. Anthropologists have argued that women carrying guns and performing public dances and activities subvert the usual notion of gender that puts women under men even among gender egalitarian communities like Tamu-mai/Gurungs (Pettigrew 2003: 321). Pettigrew and Shneiderman (2004) argue that the transformation in women’s life, however, may not be solely due to the intentions of the Maoist policies, which is influenced by the “hegemonic Hindu attitudes toward women,” but rather as a result of the “unintended consequences of the conflict that emerge in relation to women’s existing practice.” These changes, however, they have come about, have broadened and deepened the Nepali women’s struggle beyond urban and middle-class confines. It may have radicalized the gender relations significantly for more women than the mainstream women’s movement.

The dalit may benefit from the social changes that are dismantling the traditional norms of the society, including caste structure. However, the Maoist literature and public statements do not emphasize dalit issues. For instance, the 40-points demands do not contain specific dalit demands, except for an end to untouchability, which is already banned in the Constitution. The policies toward ethnic groups published in Janadest Weekly (2058 v.s.) says that the dalit will be given priority in education, employment, development, administration, and health but politics is not included. Further, it does not say how the dalit will be given priority. Nearly all political parties have come forward with such general statements. Likewise, Prachanda, the all-powerful chairman of the insurgency movement, in his 28-pages interview to Onesto does not discuss the dalit problems as he does indigenous nationalities, women, and madheshi issues. Onesto’s several months of journey into Macland in 1999 and 2000 and her 22 dispatches to the Revolutionary Worker Online do not emphasize the dalit issues specifically. She does not mention meeting any dalit leaders or activists in her entire trip of several months covering the east of Kathmandu to the mid-west. The omissions are striking since untouchability is a prevalent form of social discrimination and raising the dalit issue has become somewhat of a popular fashion among the government and mainstream non-government organizations.

17 Onesto mentions a couple of times when dalit came to talk with her about family members killed in the insurgency. However, she does not elaborate on the dalit issues in any of the dispatches. Since Onesto traveled to areas where she was taken by the Maoists to highlight their insurgency and demonstrate their achievements, the fact that she did not write about dalit issues may be because the Maoists did not emphasize them to her.
many of who do not give as much importance to indigenous nationalities and madheshi issues.

The high participation of indigenous nationalities and dalit in the Maoist insurgency has benefited the indigenous nationalities and dalit community indirectly by increasing the bargaining power of the minority activists' vis-à-vis the government. The minority leaders may derive more concessions from the government in terms of favorable public policies and positions. However, such concessions have been minimal. The formation of dalit and women commissions and an academy of indigenous nationalities by the Deuba government are significant at the symbolic level only. The commissions and the academy do not have capacities to bring about significant changes in the lives of minorities. The minority demands are for political power sharing and equitable presence in governance, proportional distribution of resources, and equality among cultures and ethnic/caste groups.

The proposed reservation program for the dalit, indigenous nationalities, and women to be launched in April of 2004 by the state, though welcome, is severely inadequate for several reasons. One, it does not include reservation in politics. In India, after 50 years of experience, the emphasis among scholars and activists is that the reservation in the political sphere is the most important (Chandra 2000, Corbridge 2000, Subba 2003, Varshney 2000). Two, the proposed reservation are inadequate even in the sectors where it has been proposed. It proposes 10 percent and 5 percent reservations for dalit and indigenous nationalities respectively, far less than their population proportion, especially to the indigenous nationalities (who comprise more than 35 percent of the population). Third, those who have attended schools can access reservation policies. Thus, the policy will not be able to reach the millions who are not educated. Fourth, reservation policy is one among many types of policies required. It alone will not address the various problems faced by the minorities.

Since opposition parties normally can support many issues but may not implement them when they come to power, evaluation of performance is essential. The Maoists have been the most ferocious group opposing the imposition of compulsory Sanskrit in schools, a sensitive issue hurting the indigenous nationalities, often through coercive means like burning question papers and threatening teachers. The Maoists have also demanded for a secular state consistently. These are positive performance but they are mostly related to symbolic realms. I will later on discuss their failure in meeting promises in substantive realms, such as declaring autonomous regions within their area of control.

**Negative Impact and Problems**

Despite some positive outcomes of the Maoist insurgency on the minorities, several problems exist. The first problem is that a high number of minorities, especially the indigenous nationalities, have been killed, as discussed earlier. Both the government and the Maoists have killed the indigenous nationalities in large numbers: nearly in equal proportion (32.51 and 33.2 percent by the Maoists and the police respectively). Members of other minority groups also have been killed, though in less numbers. More have suffered as their properties have been destroyed, or they had to leave their homes, or pay forced donations to the Maoists, and live in fear of both the security forces and the Maoists.

Second, the Maoists have not raised issues relating to all minorities. In addition to the lack of emphasis of dalit issues, discussed in the previous section, the Maoists have not raised madheshi issues as much as they have raised the issues of others. For instance, the 1996 40-points Maoists demands did not include any specific positive madheshi issues. It discusses many demands of the indigenous nationalities (such as education in mother tongue, autonomy, secularity of the state, and so on) but does not mention the citizenship problem, a burning madheshi issue. In fact, some of the Maoist demands and postures are problematic with regard to the madheshi. A couple of the points in the nationalism section are against the interests of madheshi. For instance, the 40-points include two points that demand that “the entire Nepal-Indian border should be controlled and systematized” and “Hindi video, cinema, and all kinds of such newspapers and magazines should be completely stopped.” The first point is problematic for madheshi because if the border is controlled, it will create difficulties in travelling to bordering India for shopping, visiting families, education, and employment. In addition, people without citizenship certificates would probably not be able to travel at all because it is doubtful whether they would be issued Nepali passports or identity

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18 According to a citizenship commission formed during the 9-month minority rule of the CPN-UML (Man Mohan Adhikari as Prime minister) in 1994, more than 3 million Nepalis above 16 years do not have citizenship certificates (Upadhyaya 1995). Madheshi activists claim that the number is higher and that the majority of the citizenship-less Nepali are madheshi. Many Nepali who vote regularly in elections are also without citizenship certificates.
cards without citizenship certificates. On the other hand, the ban on Hindi movies, newspapers, and magazines will curtail the cultural life of madheshī, many of whom speak Hindi and share the north Indian culture.

The ignorance or the lack of sensitivity toward the madheshī issues by the Maoists, at least till 2000, can also be gauged by non-coverage of the madheshī issues by the Janadesh Weekly, the Maoists mouthpiece. In comparison to the prominent coverage of indigenous nationalities, dalit, and women issues, the weekly published no news on madheshī during a two months-long investigation in 2057 v. s. (2000), except for three news items on the Kamaiya (bonded labor) movement that was at its peak (Lawoti and Yatra 2000).

In recent years, the Maoists have raised more issues of the madheshī in general. The later Maoist documents recognize some of the madheshī problems. For instance, the programs toward nationalities published in the Janadesh Weekly (2058 v.s.) include the citizenship issue but rather in general terms, as other mainstream political parties have done. Since the lack of recognition of the citizenship issue in the mainstream society is very high while the problem among madheshī is pervasive, unless it is explicitly dealt with mere mention of it in declarations may be inadequate to address it. On the other hand, the Maoists still have to raise the issues of specific groups like the Muslims. Further the Janadesh Weekly document, which is more progressive than the 40-points demands, however depicts the madheshī community as ‘people of Tarai.’ The madheshī activists if not resenting, oppose the use of the term ‘people of Tarai.’ The ‘people of Tarai’ incorporates all residents of the Tarai, including the hill migrants whereas madheshī does not. The use of the term ‘people of Tarai’ either indicates discomfort, the ignorance of nuances, or the rejection of the concept connoted by the word madheshī. Whatever it is, it shows the lack of sensitivity of the Maoists toward the madheshī community.

Third, the Maoists also lack commitment in substantial issues such as reservations or affirmative action policies. One of the main demands of the dalit, indigenous nationalities, madheshī, and women is reservation in public offices, employment, and education. The Maoists’ 40-points demands to the government and other program and policies do not mention reservations. Some Marxists argue that reservation operates within a liberal democratic framework, which the Maoists reject. However, the argument does not hold if we study the former USSR, where a policy of recruiting various nationalities in the government and polity were actively pursued (Slezkin 1996). Further, dalit and indigenous nationalities activists aligned with other communist parties in Nepal demand reservations. The concern of the minorities is not about this ideological framework or that, but rather an end to inequality and exclusion they face through inclusive policies such as reservations, whatever one might prefer to call them.

The fourth problem is that the Maoist insurgency may have hindered the mainstream minority movements by recruiting potential cadres away from their causes. The diversion of a large number of minority members to the Maoist insurgency may have constrained the growth of the social justice movements as minorities give their time, resources, and often live for the Maoist insurgency instead of ethnic movements. The Maoist gain is the loss to the social justice movement to a certain extent because the social justice movements end up with a shrunken pool from which to draw their cadres from. For instance, the defection of dalit office bearers to the Maoists in the districts, discussed earlier, hindered the activities of the mainstream dalit organizations they have quit.

The fifth problem is that as everyone else in Nepal, the minorities are also suffering from the culture of violence and destruction that has almost become the norm in most parts of the country. In addition to the killings discussed earlier, the destruction of infrastructures such as telephones, bridges, schools, agriculture line agencies, health posts, and banks have deprived the rural population with even the few services they had. It has also pushed economic development and possibilities for material welfare further behind. Not only the rural rich but the rural poor have suffered from the destruction. Perhaps, the poor suffer more, as basic items like food become scarce in the rural areas. The minorities also suffer from the destruction, loss of such basic services, and scarcity of food and other goods.

Overlap of Interests or Strategic Exploitation of Grievances?

Minority Distrust toward the Maoist Leadership and Ideology

Considerable distrust toward the dominant group, especially the Bāhun leadership, exists among the minority activists. The distrust extends to the level of political parties as well, including the Maoists led by Bāhun. For instance, I frequently heard from indigenous nationalities

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19 Lawoti and Yatra’s investigation mentioned earlier did not cover this issue of Janadesh Weekly.
20 There is a difference between madheshī and madhiše. The latter is considered derogatory by madheshī.
that if the supreme leaders of the Maoists had been members of indigenous nationalities, some Bāhūn within the party would have had them arrested or killed by informing the police. Various stereotypes about the Bāhūn among the minorities and the writings of indigenous nationalities’ leaders and intellectuals attest to the existence of such feelings (Gurung 1993; Yakhara 1995; Bhattachan 1999; Tamang 2000; Malla 1992). Anthropologists have also recorded distrust of Limbu, Tharu, and other groups toward the Bāhūn, and conflicts between the minorities and the dominant group (Caplan 1970; Guneratne 2002; Hangen 2000). The minorities claim that there is a classic dominant culture of presenting a false positive charade at the front while simultaneously working to undermine their cause from behind.\(^{21}\)

Many activists involved in ethnic organizations allege that the Maoists are exploiting the frustrations of the minorities to recruit them for an insurgency that will not address their problems and aspirations. Gore Badhur Khaplang, president of the Nepal Magar Sangh and the general secretary of the RJP, claims that Magars are being killed in the territorial war that is not theirs (de Sales 2003).\(^{22}\) In the case of the indigenous nationalities, the analysis of the killings in the earlier section bears out this allegation: both the government and the Maoists have killed a very high proportion of indigenous nationalities. During the second cease-fire Dr Baburam Bhattarai, the second in command of the Maoist Party, acknowledged that indigenous nationalities have died in a high number during the insurgency.

The animosity and distrust between the Maoists and activists belonging to formal minority organizations speak volume about differences that exist between them. The distrust exists in some cases because some of the minority leaders are former communists who quit after perceiving double standards, such as the projection of pro-minority image but exclusion in the leadership in the communist parties. Encounters between activists of the Maoists and minority organizations at the grassroots level also sometimes exacerbate the tension and mistrust. This is heightened by the intolerant and violent means of the Maoists. RJP leaders say that the Maoists have annihilated some of their party cadres in the name of class enemies. Some of this animosity may also be due to the clash of interests in the recruitment of ethnic cadres.

There is a difference at the ideological level as well. Minority activists’ main concern is the empowerment of their groups whereas for the Maoists it is only one of the many issues. The Maoists, underpinned by strong class analysis, may not give ethnic issues equal recognition. Indigenous nationalities leaders from the Maoists stronghold of western hills say that the Maoists undermine their cause by labeling them as narrow and “communal” for focusing supposedly only on ethnic issues.\(^{23}\)

Secondly, the ethnic activists are advocating for cultural, social, and political pluralism, so as to receive recognition for their culture, language, and tradition. As the Maoists are against pluralism, indicated by their elimination of enemies and intolerance toward opposition, ideological conflicts exist.

Additionally, the cultural differences between the Maoist leadership and ethnic activist may also be fuelling the distrust. Scholars have sensed that the dominant Maoist leadership is guided by its cultural values. For instance, Gellner (2003: 21, fn. 21) discusses the suspicion of another scholar, Philippe Ramirez, on the connection between the Maoist cult of martyrs and Brahmanical background of the Maoist leadership. The ban on alcohol by the Maoists also suggests that they are not sensitive toward the life styles and norms of the indigenous nationalities and dalit. For the Bāhūn, alcohol may be impure but for the indigenous nationalities and dalit it is a way of life. Likewise, the denial of news reports of cows, the Hindu deity, being killed in the Maoist dominated areas also suggests the discrepancies between the practice of the people and leadership representation of the situation. The interesting issue here is the denial of the news by the leaderships despite the fact that the Kham-Magars of the mid-west have not quit eating beef. The need felt by the Maoist leadership to deny the beef eating claims in areas of their dominance suggest existence of values that are guided by the Hindu ethos.

The distrust is fuelled by the long history of exploitation and contemporary ethnic/caste based oppressions, and insensitivity toward minority cultures and values. The lack of trust leads the minorities to question the intentions of the Maoists who are also led by Bāhūn. This distrust toward the Maoist ideology and leadership should not be treated lightly. It is a perception that is held by a large group of minority.

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21 This is based on conversations with dalit and indigenous nationalities activists. Dalit activists expressed similar sentiments during a UNDP focus group meeting organized in Hotel Himalaya in late 2000 in preparation of the Nepal Human Development Report.

22 This is a frequent claim made by many other indigenous nationalities activists.

23 Based on interviews and personal communication with indigenous nationalities’ activists and leaders.
activists. The history of ethnic exploitation indicates that there is basis for this distrust. Additionally, the Maoist attitudes, behaviors, strategies, and plan of actions also provide grounds for distrust.

Strategic Reasons for Raising the Minority Issues

Are the Maoists raising the minority issues because of genuine empathy or due to calculated need for expanding their base among a grieved population? The Maoists may have raised minority issues, which are 'radical,' to overcome the difficulties that small political parties, which the Maoist party was until it began the insurgency, face in the expansion of political parties in a patrimonial society because political activists are already aligned with major political parties.24 Small political parties with little influence at the district or central levels face difficulties in recruiting new members for expansion unless they offer issues that have not been raised by the mainstream political parties. The major mainstream political parties do not support many of the minority issues, such as the right to self-determination, ethnic autonomy, and so on. The support to these issues has helped the Maoists to attract the minorities. Less minority support to the NCP-Unity Center and the United Peoples Front-Nepal, the pre-insurgency Maoista forms that had not supported major minority issues, shows that the Maoists began receiving minority support after 1996 when they deliberately began raising the issues.25 The comparison of the ethnic policy of the unity center and the evolving attitudes of the Maoist shows that they began to espouse specific ethnic demands more vehemently right before or at the beginning of the insurgency. For instance, the 1991 National Unity Convention of CPN Unity Center espoused only two minority issues: secular state and linguistic equality. They were yet to endorse the issue of ethnic autonomy. But before the beginning of the armed insurgency, the First National Conference held in July 1995 adopted minority issues such as ethnic autonomy, special privileges to dalit, and ethnic council at the center (Sharma 2002).

The Maoists made extra efforts at recruiting the indigenous nationalities when they began planning for the insurgency. The Maoist documents reveal that it was a strategy to woo the indigenous nationalities at the beginning of the insurgency. In the Third Expanded Meeting held on March 15, the Maoists passed a resolution, which said "... (Maoist) struggle against the national oppression on the majority of nationalities (this) will also provide good mass base for guerilla war" (CPN-Maoist, 1997). The strategy document clearly shows that the Maoists were planning to reap benefits by extending support to the major minority issues.

The Maoists have not raised the issues of small groups that do not matter politically in terms of numbers. For instance, they did not raise ethnic issues among the Thangmi, a small indigenous nationalities group (Shneiderman and Turin forthcoming). Another example of negligence of groups that do not matter in terms of size is the case of the minority Muslims, a group living in a constant fear of Hindu backlash. The fear of backlash among the Muslim is so high that they have resisted from making their demands public despite facing religious inequalities, media bashing, cultural discrimination, and severe social stereotypes (Ansari forthcoming, Lawoti 2000).26 On the other hand, the Maoist position that cultural autonomy will be awarded to the dominant regional nationalities may not address the problems of numerous small minority groups. In terms of linguistic and cultural survival, problems faced by small groups are more pertinent because many of them are on the verge of extinction.

Comparisons of ethnographic work on the Kham-Magars, Gurung/Tamu mai, and Thangmi also reveal that the Maoists had strategic interests in mobilizing the indigenous nationalities. De Sales (2003:343) argues that it was no coincidence that the Maoist selected the regions of the Kham-Magars (Rolpa and Rukum) as their base area. In addition to the region being rural, inaccessible, and underdeveloped, the Kham-Magars, natives of the land, had grievances against the state, were

26 An indicator of their fear is that in the last decade no Nepali Muslim has published a book on Nepali Muslims, their conditions and demands, despite volumes having been written by dalit and indigenous nationalities on their plights and their demands upon the state and society. This is despite the community having more university-educated persons than the dalit. Likewise the perception that the Muslims in Nepal are safer than in India is a myth because several religious riots have occurred in the last decade. It is absurd to assume that Muslims have no complaints at all, as some dominant members suggest. They face religious discrimination as well as discrimination by civil and penal laws.
known to protect their social cultural institutions and tradition, and were yet to be involved in the ethnic movement that had ‘exploded’ since 1990. The potentials of such people for activism are well perceived by leaders of the revolutionary movements and she suggests the Maoists could have followed a similar reasoning. Among other things, as the situation developed the Maoists promised Kham-Magars autonomy, an issue the Kham-Magars had themselves not demanded before.

In contrast, Shneiderman and Turin (forthcoming) did not find active espousal of ethnic slogans in Dolakha by the Maoists. They suggest that perhaps, as the Maoists arrived late in Dolakha when the insurgency’s attraction had grown among the oppressed groups, the Maoists perhaps did not feel the need to promise ethnic rights, such as ethnic autonomy. The scholars’ analysis that the Maoists perhaps had to raise the ethnic issues in Rolpa and Rukum at an earlier phase to attract the Kham-Magars and did not feel the need to raise them in the Dolakha since they had become attractive by then is plausible. If the Maoists were really concerned about ethnic issues, they should have raised the issues in Dolakha also. Clearly, they did not. This also suggests that the raising of the ethnic issues is a strategy of the Maoists rather than genuine empathy.

The analysis of the development of the Maoist attitude toward ethnic issues over the years also suggests that they began to raise the minority issues as a political strategy to attract the minorities into the insurgency. If we compare the meeting minutes and public statements of the Maoists in a longitudinal manner, we can see that the later documents raise the minority issues more than the earlier ones. For instance, as discussed earlier, the citizenship issue with regard to the mandahi was not included in the 40-point demands in 1996. On the other hand, it is included, even though without clarity, in the policy toward the nationalities published in Janadesh Weekly in 2000. Likewise, the Maoists began to raise the issue of autonomy in 1995 (First National Conference), just before the initiation of the insurgency. The party or its parent party/parties had not raised it for nearly half a century of existence. Similarly, the right to self-determination was adopted in 1998 at its 4th Expanded Meeting (Sharma 2002), when the insurgency was still confined to a few districts in the midwest and the need to broaden it by expanding its scope existed.

However, one might argue that the Maoists raised the issues once they become aware of them. Is it so? In this case, their sincerity or lack of it would indicate whether it is a strategy or not. The problems of sincerity in fulfilling the promises have surfaced, especially with regard to major issues. For instance, even though the Maoists declared support for cultural autonomy and self-determination rights, they did not provide it in areas under their control till 2003. They could have declared a Magarat region in the mid-west, areas under their control and where they have formed many Peoples Governments. This lack of implementation of promises questions their sincerity.

The Maoists began to declare governments for the ethnic autonomous regions in early 2004. However, it has come after the army’s claims of success in its counter insurgency campaigns against the Maoists. The failure of the Maoists to successfully raid district headquarters and security barracks after the break-up of the second ceasefire lends credence to the army’s claims. The declaration of the autonomous regions at a time when they are suffering setbacks but not when they were in a winning spree also raises questions about their intentions. Would they have formed the ethnic autonomous regions if they had continued their winning streak? Would they have formed the autonomous ethnic regions if they were not pushed to the wall by the setbacks? Are the accommodations to the ethnic demands and aspirations tools to mobilize the ethnic groups in times of dire straits but of lesser significance when successful?

A careful analysis of their documents reveals further indicators of their lack of sincerity in keeping up the minority issues. For instance, Sharma (2002:17,20) says that the Constitution of the United Revolutionary People’s Council’s (URPC), supposedly a shadow government headed by Dr. Baburam Bhattarai formed in September 2001, suggests that the self-determination of ethnic groups may not come about even if the Maoist come to power. Even though the URPC Constitution has formed nine autonomous regions, the positions within the regional governments are to be filled by the party. The role of the ethnic fronts has been minimized in the formation of the autonomous regions.

The different sources of information, events, and activities discussed indicate that the Maoists are raising the minority issue as a strategy to recruit minority cadres for the insurgency. The involvement of the minorities in the insurgency might mean that they might influence the Maoist party to some extent to meet their group-related demands. However, as the party is not raising minority issues due to genuine empathy, the CHBE leadership may drop the issues they are not comfortable with, once they obtain power or feel less-dependent upon minority cadres for their expansion, existence, or the meeting of their objectives. Such a case may not be unusual in Nepal because other progressive parties of their day dropped progressive but cultural related issues at crucial moments. For instance, the NC and NCP-UML, parties
that espoused secularity, did not stand for it while making the 1991 Constitution.

Conclusion
The Maoists may fulfill, or address, some of the demands of the minorities, and hence play a useful function in their empowerment. Increased participation in the insurgency and rising of minority issues has also contributed positively to the minority social justice movements. However, these positive benefits do not mean that the Maoists may, will, or can address substantial aspirations of the minorities. As this article has shown, the reasons behind highlighting the minorities' issues are strategies to recruit the minorities by exploiting their dissatisfaction and grievances. This indicates the lack of genuine empathy toward the minorities. The Maoists did not establish autonomous ethnic regions when they were successful but have formed them only after they suffered setbacks. Likewise, the Maoist Constitution of the United Revolutionary People's Council undermines the role of ethnic fronts, which they have used to mobilize the minorities. Thus, the Maoist behavior provides ample opportunity to suspect their intentions.

Despite the missives minority activists have about the Maoists, minority participation in the insurgency may continue to be significant in the coming days. As the Maoists can address partial problems of the minorities, some of the minority members will probably continue to take part in the insurgency. Not only is there the pull attraction by the Maoists in terms of promises but there is the push factor as well. Despite the passage of thirteen years since democracy was restored, the state and the dominant society have not fulfilled fundamental demands of the minorities, and widespread discrimination continues. In absence of positive responses from the state and the failure of the society and the minority activists to make the state initiate substantive changes, it is not surprising that some minorities feel that they have no other alternative but to join the Maoists in their movement to overthrow the existing regime that they perceive is oppressive.

On the other hand, the mainstream political parties and the state can lower the minority attraction toward the Maoists by initiating substantive policy changes to end discrimination and fulfill minority aspirations. Likewise, as the ethnic parties and organizations get broadened and increase their influence, the attraction toward the Maoists may also reduce.

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