Experiences of the 1996-2006 Civil Conflict in Nepal

Narratives of Engagement of Tamangs (Indigenous People) and Bahun-Chhetris (Non-Indigenous People)

Asha Lal Tamang
**Statement of Originality**

The thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being made available for loan and photocopying subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.

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Date ……………………………………………………………..
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Asha Lal Tamang
28 September 2012
Australia
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Abstract

This thesis explores people’s experiences of the recent political insurgency in Nepal that impinged upon, and transformed everyday life in rural communities. Since 1996, the civil conflict has killed more than 13,000 people, injured thousands, displaced many others, and damaged innumerable properties. Employing qualitative techniques: focus group discussions, in-depth interviews and extended family case studies - the study has generated knowledge from two groups: a marginalised indigenous people - the Tamangs; and the dominant non-indigenous people - the Bahun-Chhetris.

Findings imply that poor governance and injustice was the root cause of the conflict, and that was fuelled by pervasive discrimination and low socio-economic status, especially for those in rural areas, and for members of marginal groups. The civil conflict severely affected livelihoods and national development. Access to basic social services, especially health and education, was restricted. Overall, livelihood opportunities were reduced. Rural people adopted various coping strategies to maintain their survival; among them: silence, avoidance and adaptation. The impact of the conflict was different for Tamangs and Bahun-Chhetris, and so were some of the coping strategies. The higher socio-economic status and better networking skills of the Bahun-Chhetris gave them a distinct advantage.

Both men and women participated in the civil conflict. The bravery of female rebels convinced the government to recruit women into the national military forces. Through the Maoist rhetoric and promises, the civil conflict raised the people’s awareness overall and increased expectations, leading to the post-conflict emergence of some intensified ‘identity politics’ based on ethnicity, religion and geographical differences.

Neither the Maoists nor the government gained an ultimate victory in the war. Nonetheless, post-conflict, Nepal became a 'Federal Democratic Republic’ with the Maoist Party in control. The main leaders of the new government in the New Nepal came from among the Bahun-Chhetris with the inclusion of a few ethnic elites. Post-conflict transformation in the New Nepal has been very slow, particularly in
establishing peace and security, and institutionalising democracy and human rights. Indigenous groups and marginalised minorities feel that their needs and demands have not been met, despite the promises of Maoist rhetoric during the civil war, and continuing policy initiatives of the current government. There is still a risk of local and perhaps widespread civil insurgency, especially if people’s expectations and the post-conflict issues are not addressed appropriately as the years go by.

Beyond the contribution to knowledge about contemporary Nepal, this thesis makes a contribution to our knowledge about the experience of ordinary people in civil insurgencies in South Asia. It also contributes to the epistemology of people’s movements, political insurgencies and violent events that have impacted on and transformed the society of developing countries. Most importantly, the thesis has made visible the roles played by rural people in the process of making histories or bringing changes in a state governance system, an area of enquiry that has suffered from under-acknowledgement, and a lack of research.

Key words:
Tamangs, Bahun-Chhetris, ethnic groups, civil conflict, civil war, political insurgency, violence, access, social services, health, education, livelihood opportunities, coping, survival strategies, post-conflict, transformation, peace, security, social development, wellbeing.
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**List of Abbreviations and Glossaries**

**I] Abbreviations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AD</td>
<td>Anno Domini (after the birth of Christ)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BC</td>
<td>Before Christ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BS</td>
<td>Bikram Sambat (in the Bikram era)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CA</td>
<td>Constituent Assembly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDO</td>
<td>Chief District Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPA</td>
<td>Comprehensive Peace Agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DSP</td>
<td>Deputy Superintendent of Police</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FGD</td>
<td>Focus Group Discussion(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP</td>
<td>Gross Domestic Product</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIV/AIDS</td>
<td>Human Immuno-deficiecy Virus/ Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILO</td>
<td>International Labour Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Int</td>
<td>Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HDR</td>
<td>Human Development Report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MDG</td>
<td>Millennium Development Goal(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCDN</td>
<td>National Committee for Development of Nationalities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEFIN</td>
<td>Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NLSS</td>
<td>National Living Standard Survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLA</td>
<td>People’s Liberation Army</td>
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<tr>
<td>VDC</td>
<td>Village Development Committee</td>
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</table>
II] Glossaries

**Adivasi**: The ‘first settlers’ or ‘indigenous inhabitants’. The Tamangs are *Adivasi* of the central part of Nepal surrounding the Kathmandu valley.

**Bahun-Chhetri**: Bahun and Chhetri are two high caste group names used together to denote high caste people. They originally lived in the hills region and followed the Hindu caste hierarchy. The equivalent Tamang term is ‘Jyarti or Jyardi’.

**Bandha**: Literally means ‘closure’. It indicates strikes and protests which impose forceful closure especially of markets, transportation and educational institutes.

**Bombos or Bonpos**: Originally, they were the traditional and genealogical priests of the Tamangs, who recited oral texts and conducted rites. They are also shamanic healers who walk in both the physical and the unseen world of gods, demons and ancestral spirits. The Bahun-Chhetris call them *Jhankris or Dhami-Jhankris*.

**Dalit**: Means ‘oppressed’, and is used as a respectful term that represents lower caste Hindus, for example, Kami, Damai and Sarki.

**Gotra**: Denotes a Hindu group belonging to a particular *Rishi* [saint or seer]. Both Bahun-Chhetris and Dalits are thought to be the descendants of various *Rishis* and share a common *Gotra*.

**Gurkhas**: This is the common English name given to Nepalese soldiers who worked for the British empire during the 19th and 20th centuries. Because of their unique bravery and loyalty to the British especially during World Wars I and II, they became famous throughout the world. These Nepalese fighters mainly came from indigenous groups (Gurungs, Limbus, Magars and Rais), but indigenous Tamangs living around the capital were not allowed to join. The Tamangs who did join were compelled to deny their ethnicity.
Jana Andolan I: The unarmed ‘People’s Movement I’ launched by the Nepalese political parties in 1990 that ended the monopoly of the King’s Panchayat rule and established a multi-party parliamentary democracy in Nepal. Five years after this achievement, the Maoists began their war against the parliamentary government and the existing monarchical hegemony.

Jana Andolan II: In 2006, the ousted political parties formed a Seven-Party-Alliance (SPA), which endorsed the Maoist demand for an election of the constituent assembly and instigated another unarmed ‘People’s Movement II’ against autocratic rule. The Maoists and millions of people joined the Movement. Then the King stepped down and re-established the previously dissolved parliament. This event opened the door to ending the 240 year old Shah Dynasty Rule in 2008.

Janajatis: Indigenous peoples of Nepal. It is a popular term which represents different ethnic groups who were/are non-Hindu and who densely populate their traditional territories, for example, Rais and Limbus in eastern Nepal; and Tamangs in central Nepal.

Kaththa: Nepalese traditional land area measurement unit in the southern plans area. 1 Kaththa = 0.0338 hectares (approximately).

Lama: Originally, this was a title for a priest who practised Tibetan Buddhism and belonged to a Tibeto-Burman group of people like the Tamangs or Gurungs. Nowadays, some people of Tibeto-Burman origin use Lama as their last name although they may not belong to a priestly family.

Madheshi: The People of Madhesh [the southern plains of Nepal] who do not fall within the Janajati grouping.

Paathi: Nepalese traditional volume measurement unit. It is especially used to measure edible items, for example, rice, grains and oil. 1 Paathi = 4.5 litres or 4.5 kilograms (approximately).
Panchayat: Politically, a unitary state governance system that operated in Nepal for three decades till 1990. Socio-culturally, it was a traditional democratic system for resolving social disputes which was practised in ancient Nepal. Contemporary Nepalese society perceives the meaning of the term more politically.

Ropani: Nepalese traditional land area measurement unit in the hills and mountains. 1 Ropani = 0.052 hectares (approximately).

Rui: A Tamang clan group or sub-group which can be taken as an equivalent of Gotra among Bahun-Chhetris. Many Tamangs use their Rui as their last name, for example, Yonjan and Waiba.

Rupee(s) or Rupaiyaa: Nepalese national currency. According to the Nepal Rastra Bank, the average buying exchange rate for USD 1 was Rs 70.81 in 2000, Rs 72.53 in 2006 and Rs 74.30 in 2011.

SLC test: Students in Nepal must take School Leaving Certificate (SLC) test after they successfully pass grade 10. Most students from public students fail in this test, for example, only 29 per cent public school students passed the test in 2005.

Tamang: A neutral term to indicate one of the indigenous peoples of Nepal. Bahun-Chhetris use the term ‘Lama’ to address Tamangs more respectfully.

Tolaa: Nepalese traditional weight measurement unit. It is especially used to measure precious metals, for example, gold and silver. 1 Tolaa = 11.664 grams (approximately).
Chapter 1. Outlining the Thesis

1.1. Introduction

This chapter outlines the thesis in general. It begins with a short background section about Nepal; describes the problem to be addressed; and presents research questions, objectives of the study and scope and limitations. In the last section, an overview of the remaining chapters is presented.

Nepal is one of the six developing countries in South Asia with its neighbours Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. The countries in this region are affected by endemic armed conflicts. In 2009 and 2010, nearly 40,000 people were killed in South Asian region (SAPT 2011), that is, more than 50 persons per day lost their lives due to conflicts. Nepal was drawn into a Maoist-led armed conflict in February 1996 when the government failed to address a 40 point-demand presented by the Maoist Communist Party of Nepal (Karki and Seddon 2003). The 40 point-demand was seen as a big challenge by the government due to the perceived unachievable nature of many of the demands. It included: the abolition of special privileges for the king and royal family; and bringing the army, the police and the bureaucracy completely under popular control. At that time, Nepal was in the early stages of transitioning to a multi-party parliamentary democratic system under the constitutional monarchy established by the people’s movement in 1990. The civil insurgency caused political upheaval that reached a peak in 2002, with the dissolution of the elected parliament, and the taking of power by the king. By the end of 2005, the political parties which had earlier been ousted by the king had aligned themselves with the Maoists. In 2006, the united front that resulted from this alignment succeeded in re-establishing parliament and officially ending the insurgency (see Wakugawa et al 2011). Despite the 2006 achievement, the country has since been suffering from insecurity, and from sporadic violence, killings and small-scale insurgent activities.

Governments of South Asian countries, including Nepal, have gained partial success in controlling conflict and violence but this has involved heavy spending on military and
other security forces. For example, India, which possesses the world’s second largest army, spent 15 per cent of its total budget on defence in 1993. In the same year, Pakistan spent 30 per cent of its total budget on defence (Johnson 2005). Johnson (2005, p 10) remarks that in Pakistan this expenditure amounted to 131 billion rupees on national security, compared to only 1.6 billion rupees on education, and 3.2 billion rupees on health. In 2011, Sri Lanka allocated 215 billion rupees to the Defence Ministry and only 75 billion rupees to the Economic Development Ministry (SAPT 2011). In 2008/09, Nepal’s expenditure by the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare was only 0.6 billion rupees whereas the expenditure by the Ministry of Defence was 14.7 billion rupees (MOF 2010). We should note here that the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) collapsed in Sri Lanka in 2010 after 26 years of violent conflict. In Nepal, the Maoists entered mainstream politics in 2007 only after a decade long armed insurgency. These examples demonstrate the way in which conflicts have restricted governments’ ability to spend in the development and social sectors. The trend of high expenditure on security and low expenditure on social services and development sectors has not yet changed. In short, service delivery and development efforts in these countries have been seriously compromised by the consequences of armed conflicts.

Yet, such conflicts impose direct and indirect effects on individuals and families, creating higher demands for social services and development programs. Examples of direct effects are killing and wounding while indirect effects are related to human welfare and are induced by changes to economic, political and social life (Bruck and Schindler 2009). Even basic necessities like food availability and shelter space are affected. Stewart (2003) found that food consumption was reduced and availability of calories per head was worsened in most conflict-affected countries. He analysed the effect of armed conflicts on development, and its relationship to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) using global data from 25 conflict-ridden countries from 1960 to 1995. Armed conflict resulted in heavy human costs in most countries, with deteriorating nutrition, health and educational standards (Stewart 2003, p 336). Nepal experienced a similar situation during the decade long civil war, including the deaths of more than 13,000 people (INSEC 2010a, 2007).
Currently there is a gap in knowledge due to a lack of studies on the Nepalese experience of the civil war from a sociological perspective. The World Food Program and Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (WFP and OCHA 2007) carried out a study but their focus was to prioritise districts to implement peace support and recovery programming in communities. Other studies have examined the Nepalese conflict from the perspectives of economic inequality and political grievances (see Upreti 2010a; Basnett 2009; Das and Hatlebakk 2009; Pradhan 2009; Do and Iyer 2007; Nayak 2007; Sharma 2006). Another set of studies emphasised the experiences of internally displaced people (see Singh et al 2007; Shrestha and Niroula 2005). Few of these studies have represented the experience of rural people to any degree, and yet the conflict was primarily based in areas outside the cities. As an attempt to fill this knowledge gap, this thesis explores rural and marginalised people’s experiences of the 1996-2006 Nepalese civil war.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Nepal today suffers from a number of problems. While prejudices in terms of caste discrimination, gender bias and ethnic issues still plague the country, long-standing economic and regional disparities were further worsened by the conflict between Maoist insurgents and government security forces between 1996 and 2006 (INSEC 2007). The ten years of violence led to the collapse of local governments, and to limited service provisions and restricted operational space for development work (Huntington 2002). Groups of people living in rural areas were more affected by the conflict because these areas were mostly under the control of Maoists and under attack from government forces (Karki and Seddon 2003). The dangerous security situation had a negative effect on the delivery of, and access to, basic social services - mainly health and education, and on economic opportunities (Amnesty International 2007; DFID 2006; HMG 2004; Singh 2004; DHSP 2003; Kattel 2003). The environment of endemic conflict increased the marginalisation of some groups, and intensified the social exclusion of rural people from the government’s public services.

Social exclusion is an extreme consequence of what happens when people are not provided with fundamental human rights throughout their lives (DFID 2005). In Nepal, women, along with indigenous and lower caste communities, have long been
systematically excluded from the public domain. Many indigenous and lower caste communities have long lived in absolute poverty (Gurung 2006; IMF 2005; HMG 2004). The powerful social and ethnic groups, that constitute the elites, controlled the social access and opportunities of those excluded from full participation in social, economic, and political life at both community and national levels (Hachhethu 2003). The people’s war led by the Maoists in Nepal gained widespread electoral support because they exposed long-standing structural and feudal attitudes in economic, social and cultural domains. They challenged discrimination based on caste, language, culture and religion. They also exposed the violation of human rights and conditions of deprivation for marginalised social and geographical groups (NPC 2007).

Given these historical circumstances, we need to know more about how the political insurgency and violence impacted on and perhaps transformed the lives of ordinary Nepalese. We need to understand the experiences of households from a perspective grounded in the everyday life of community members, especially those living in rural areas, at a time of considerable political turmoil. To obtain this knowledge, it is necessary to appraise the experiences, understandings and practices of selected rural people from a sociological/anthropological perspective, looking in particular at health, livelihoods and economic development.

1.3. Research Questions and Study Objectives

The research in this thesis was guided by the following questions:

1. What have been the impacts of the conflict on health, education, and economic development perspectives in different Nepalese communities?

2. How have community members of discrete groups occupying different socio-economic and ethnic/caste positions experienced the civil conflict?

3. What strategies have been developed to cope with the violence and the deprivation at individual, family and institutional levels?
4. What have been the experiences of geographically isolated people in the armed civil conflict?

5. How are the experiences of civil conflict and violence embedded in gender, caste and social dynamics of local communities?

6. How has the political insurgency and violence impacted on and perhaps transformed the lives of ordinary Nepalese?

The focus is on experiences of rural community members during the 1996-2006 civil war in Nepal. The study examines the level of access to basic social services and types of strategies adopted for survival, from a perspective grounded in the everyday life of community members. Therefore, the specific task objectives are:

1. To describe and analyse the effects of political violence on everyday practices related to health, education and livelihood opportunities.

2. To advance theoretical work on the politics of civil society, health, education and livelihoods.

3. To produce strategic knowledge that will contribute to the development of practical strategies and policies for community-based organisations, social groups, governmental and non-governmental organisations, donors and other interest groups so that they can better pursue their activities effectively in the context of problematic security situations in the region.

1.4. Scope and Limitations

As the study is focused in Nepal, the use of the findings is most appropriate for the peace and development of Nepal. However, researchers in other countries may also make use the findings by considering the specific contexts in their own local environment and carrying out additional research accordingly. Such studies have higher importance because armed conflicts are common in our world. In 2003, a total of 29 armed conflicts were active in 22 countries including the armed conflict in Nepal.
(Eriksson and Wallensteen 2004). During the period from 1946 to 2001, there were 225 armed conflicts around the globe; and armed conflict has remained a serious problem in the post-cold war period (Gleditsch et al 2002). Figure 1.1 below shows the prevalence of conflict by level during 1946 to 2001.

Figure 1.1: Number of armed conflicts by level, all types, 1946-2001

![Graph showing the number of armed conflicts by level from 1946 to 2001.](image)

Source: Gleditsch et al 2002, p 621.

Figure 1.2: Research participants who suffered from the ten year civil war in Nepal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A family in the hills of rural Nepal: These women had to hide war materials which were stored by Maoists in their home, and then in farm fields before government soldiers arrived at their home.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A family in the plains land of eastern Nepal: The Maoists took away one-third of their farm products. Then, the landlord ended their tenancy. Later, they migrated.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6
Although the thesis research is on the local context of Nepal (Figure 1.2) in South Asia, the ramifications of the study are global. The findings of the study will contribute not only to academic knowledge but to strategic planning; and may be useful for reducing the impact of armed civil conflicts and assisting people who have suffered from such conflicts.

1.5. Structure of the Thesis

The thesis is organised into ten chapters. Chapter 2 contains a review of literature that begins with the definition of key concepts and terms used in the thesis. It provides information about Nepal and her people with a particular focus on the ethnic, political, economic and socio-cultural context of modern Nepal. The remainder of Chapter 2 is devoted to theoretical approaches and pragmatic implications. The early section is focused on political insurgency, ethnicity and marginalised groups while the later section turns to people’s wellbeing as an outcome of access to basic social services and livelihood opportunities.

Chapter 3 explains the research methodology employed in this study. It begins with a brief outline of the research process. The following section elaborates on the appropriateness of the qualitative approach and provides an overview of the qualitative methods that were used to collect data for the thesis. It also provides information about study population, sampling and research participants. Finally, Chapter 3 describes how data has been analysed to generate valid information for use in the results chapters that follow.

The findings of the study are presented in Chapters 4 to 9. Chapters 4 to 8 show how Nepalese people, particularly those living in rural areas, experienced the civil conflict during the Maoist-led people’s war. Chapter 9 discusses their experience during the post-conflict period. All these chapters specifically analyse the experiences of two groups of people: the privileged ethnic group - Bahun-Chhetris; and a marginalised ethnic group - the Tamangs. The study paid significant attention to people’s lived experience, and these chapters, therefore, give high importance to the research participants’ own words. Wherever possible, findings have been compared and contrasted according to ethnicity, gender, geography and socio-economic status. Each
chapter deepens and elaborates our understanding of a particular field. Chapter 4 deals with causes and dynamics of the conflict while Chapter 5 considers contributions and consequences of associated factors of the conflict. Chapter 6 analyses the impact of the conflict on basic social services, with a focus on health and education. Chapters 7 and 8 examine the impact of the conflict on the struggle for existence during difficult security situations. Chapter 7 employs a ‘livelihoods analysis framework’, while Chapter 8 examines coping strategies. Many experiences were particular to the Nepalese context while some mirrored findings of studies on other countries. Finally, Chapter 9 examines popular expectations in post-conflict Nepal and the interactions between the rulers and the ruled with regard to these expectations. Chapter 9 reveals the potentially dangerous situation that the country is passing through and assesses the risk of a recurrence of civil war in Nepal. It also offers a framework for the imagining of social development and wellbeing for all.

Chapter 10 concludes the thesis. It summarises the findings of this study to argue that they can function as a useful tool in the pursuance of peace and development in Nepal. It also suggests the importance of the findings for ongoing research on the experience of ordinary people in civil conflicts, and for institutions both inside and outside Nepal.
Chapter 2. Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

This chapter is divided into four main parts. The first part defines the key concepts and terms used in this thesis and outlines the sociological perspectives used in this study. The second part provides an introduction to Nepal and the Nepalese which briefly covers the period from ancient times to the present and then details the ethnic, economic and socio-cultural background of contemporary Nepal. The third part presents a critical summary of relevant studies in the fields of political violence, ethnicity and marginalised groups. Finally, the situation of rural Nepalese in relation to accessing basic social services especially health and education, and livelihood opportunities, is detailed.

2.2. Defining the Key Concepts and Terms

The key concepts and terms used in this thesis are:

- ethnicity
- caste
- gender
- political insurgency
- basic social services
- livelihood opportunities
- survival or coping strategies

Ethnicity may be defined as belonging to a distinct group that shares some significant common characteristics depended on a shared identity, including place of origin, language, ancestry, culture and so on (Lawson and Garrod 2012). An ethnic group, therefore, consists of members who identify with each other according to shared culture and some measure of common ancestry or closely-shared point of origin. Members of ethnic groups distinguish themselves as distinct from other ethnic groups that do not share key membership characteristics. The term ethnicity is used in this thesis to refer to
the identity of groups of Nepalese people who are members of ethnic groups as defined above. The two ethnic groups in this study are firstly: ‘indigenous peoples’ or ‘Janajatis’ (HMG 2002), specifically the minority, relatively low-status Tamangs; and secondly: non-indigenous peoples or caste system Hindus, specifically the privileged ethnic group – the Bahun-Chhetris. The term ‘ethnicity’ is used in a broad sense to identify different groups of people whereas the term ‘caste’ represents certain groups of people under Hinduism who traditionally practise a hierarchical system of purity and pollution among group members. Originally, ‘caste’ was an occupational classification (Lawson and Garrod 2012). Later, it became hereditary, that is, determined at birth by parents’ caste membership.

While the term sex refers to the biological and physiological characteristics of male and female persons, gender is the social construction of maleness or femaleness that varies across societies and cultures. According to Lawson and Garrod (2012, p 207), sociologists used the term gender to ‘describe the cultural and social attributes of men and women that are manifested in appropriate masculinity and femininity’. Hence, gender refers to the social status of male and female persons. In highly patriarchal societies such as Nepal, women always have a lower social status than men. The gender roles of males and females in Nepal are strongly separated between the public and the private domain. Nevertheless, gender differences in the distinct roles of males and females are cross-cut by the status of indigenous and non-indigenous groups. So, for example, a high-caste woman will be regarded as more deserving of respect in most contexts than a Dalit man. Nevertheless, the same woman will be accorded a lesser status than a man at her own caste/ethnic level.

A political insurgency or revolution is a violent internal uprising against a sovereign government where the group organising the resistance wishes to replace the existing political system with its own political system (Lawson and Garrod 2012). Insurgencies may often commence with political agitation and local resistance, then escalate into armed civil conflict in which serious and intense episodes of militarised disputes occur (Jones et al 1996). Finally, the political insurgency may escalate into civil war involving the whole nation. The Correlates of War (COW) Project (Small and Singer 1982) has identified four main characteristics of civil war:
a) an organised military action resulting in at least 1,000 battle deaths  
b) at least five per cent of the deaths inflicted by the weaker party  
c) effective resistance  
d) active involvement of the national government

This definition fits the ten year political insurgency in Nepal. For example, the term ‘people’s war’ was used by the Maoist insurgents. That term and the term ‘civil war’ as defined by the COW project are used synonymously in this thesis. In a broader sense, ‘civil conflict’ or ‘armed civil conflict’ is also used.

**Basic social services** may be defined as taxation-funded benefits and facilities provided by a government for its citizens, such as education, health care, food subsidies, income support, legal representation, law-enforcement agencies such as police, and so on (see Halloran and Vera 2005). Basic social services directly address the needs of poor and disadvantaged people in a society and access is very important.

**Livelihood opportunities** refer to the capacities of local people to get access to the things that directly sustain them, such as the income and food provided by agriculture, for example, or local employment opportunities that provide the means for a family to survive (see DFID 2001). The specific basic social services studied in this project are health and education, while livelihood opportunities are addressed through examination of economic services and income opportunities for the two ethnic groups.

To survive is to remain alive, to continue to exist and persevere towards a basic standard of living despite threat, hardship or trauma (see OED 2013). **Survival or coping strategies** are, therefore, those means employed to that end. The political insurgency threatened the Nepalese people at all levels and in all regions, but especially those living in rural areas. Various coping strategies were developed during this time by the different ethnic and other groups in the country, with perhaps the greatest contrast between urban and rural people. When rural people adopted various actions to ensure their wellbeing, security and livelihoods, those actions may or may not have been socially accepted, or legally approved. It is important for this thesis to analyse the coping strategies adopted by the two different groups, and to see whether they are similar or dissimilar.
2.3. Nepal and its People

2.3.1. Formation of the Nation State

On 28 May 2008, the National Constituent Assembly (CA) meeting declared Nepal to be a ‘Federal Democratic Republic’ and formally ended the ancient system of monarchy. However, it is difficult to predict how long it will take to transform the country from a developing to a developed nation state and to make every Nepalese feel there has been an improvement in social wellbeing, in equal status and in access to various development opportunities. To comprehend how the country of Nepal has reached its current form as a nation state, we need to look briefly at its history.

From the pre-historical period to the seventh decade of the 18th century, ‘Nepal’ was the name used to refer only to the present day Kathmandu valley. Prithvi Narayan Shah, a Gorkha King who started to unify then small kingdoms in 1765, conquered the valley in 1768 (Thapa et al 2008) and established the rule of the Shah Dynasty in Nepal. At that time, more than 60 small kingdoms outside the Kathmandu valley existed. The valley was divided into three kingdoms in 1482: Kathmandu, Patan, and Bhadgaon (Shrestha 2002). Prithvi Narayan Shah and his successors expanded Nepal’s borders from Tista River in the east across the Sutlej River to Kangara in the west until they faced a war against the British East India Company in 1815 (Thapa 1995). After conquering the valley, Prithvi Narayan Shah declared Kathmandu the capital of the newly unified Nepal in 1768 (Baskota 1998). Since then, the capital has developed as the centre of administration, politics and commerce.

Historically, Nepal was ruled by various clans: by the Gopalbansis from 900 to 700 BC; by Mahispals from 700 to 625 BC; by Kirats from 625 BC to 100 AD; by Lichchhavis from 100 to 1000 AD; and by Mallas up to 1768 (Thapa et al 2008; Shrestha 2002). Given the lack of historical records, the Gopalbansis, Mahispals and Kirats are thought to have been primitive tribal groups who used to shift from one place to another to search for food and shelter. According to the oldest historical record, written on a stone during the period of the first Lichchhavi King Mandev, the then territory of Nepal was expanded in the east and west of the Kathmandu valley (Baskota 1998) by the
Lichchhavis who had come to Nepal from Northern India. After about 900 years of rule, the Lichchhavis gradually disappeared and ruling power was taken over by ‘Mallas’ [the wrestlers]. By that time, many small kingdoms had reappeared and the territory of Nepal was again limited to the present day Kathmandu valley (Shrestha 2002). Prithvi Narayan Shah, the king of Gorkha kingdom, eyed off the then Nepal and subsequently, succeeded in expanding his rule to take it over.

Although present day Nepal is a small developing country in South Asia, landlocked by Tibet/China and India, it has never been directly colonised by western or other imperialist powers. The present political border of Nepal was fixed during the first half of the 19th century. The ‘Treaty of Sugauli’ was signed with British India after the Anglo-Nepalese War (1815–16). This important treaty shaped the current political boundary (Thapa 1995). After the War, about two-thirds of Nepalese land was included in British India. However, some parts of Terai - the plains region - was later annexed to Nepal (Shrestha 2002; Baskota 1998) as a ‘friendly gesture’ by British India because of Nepal’s role in helping the British maintain their control in India during the so-called Sepoy Rebellion of 1857 (Thapa 1995). Therefore, the present existence of Nepal as a nation-state actually represents a collection of territories with different cultural and political histories.

2.3.2. An Account of Political Insurgencies

Early on, Prithvi Narayan Shah and his successors unified small kingdoms and made the greater Nepal. Similarly the history of modern Nepal emerged from a number of political insurgencies and/or armed conflicts. It can be argued that, during the Shah Dynasty rule, the first armed insurgency was successfully carried out by Jung Bahadur Rana, a Chhetri from a peasant family of Gorkha, who rose to power by murdering his opponents in the Kot Massacre of 1846 (Brown 1996). Rana made the King just a titular figure and founded the hereditary autocratic Rana regime (Shrestha 2002; Baskota 1998). The Ranas were staunchly pro-British and assisted the British whenever required. They supported the British in both World Wars by sending approximately 200,000 Nepalese youths, about 20 per cent of the adult male population at that period, to serve under the British flag (Mishra 2007). These Nepalese, who mainly came from
indigenous groups (Gurungs, Magars, Limbus and Rais) in the east and west parts of Nepal, are renowned today in military history as the ‘Gurkhas’.

A significant people’s insurgency was launched against the Jung Bahadur Rana regime in 1876 in Gorkha by Lakhan Thapa Magar. The insurgency involved hundreds of people and is generally regarded as the first serious and important armed movement in modern Nepal. The Rana regime was able to suppress the insurgency by executing Lakhan Thapa Magar and other leaders while many others were jailed or sent into exile (Karki and Seddon 2003; Nepal 2003). Similarly, in 1932 a group of young Nepalis calling themselves Prachanda Gorkha planned to bomb all the senior Rana rulers but were arrested before they could execute their plan. Another notable insurgency in eastern Nepal led by Yog Maya Neupane demanded justice and truth against many forms of state oppression. Although it was a non-violent campaign, Yog Maya was jailed in 1939 and released within a year. In 1940, four of her followers were killed which saddened her to the point that she jumped into the Arun River to her death with 68 of her followers (Karki and Seddon 2003; Shakya 2003). Praja Parishad, the first political party formed in 1935 with the goal of democracy, distributed leaflets in Kathmandu during the 1940s. Those involved were arrested and sentenced to death or sent to serve long jail sentences. In 1950, the Nepali Congress Party with the ‘Mukti Sena’ [Liberation Army] and Communist Party of Nepal started an armed revolution against the Rana regime.

Pro-democracy movements led by political parties, the fleeing of King Tribhuvan to India, and the pressure exerted by the Indian government ended 104 years of autocratic rule (Karki and Seddon 2003; Nepal 2003) and established a constitutional democracy in Nepal in 1951 (Mishra 2007). After a considerable period of transition and political instability, a parliamentary election was held in 1959 in which the Nepali Congress Party, a centre political party with a right wing ideology, won a majority of parliamentary seats. However, in December 1960, using the military might of the state, King Mahendra dissolved the people’s elected government; jailed all the cabinet members and a large number of workers from political parties; and introduced the partyless ‘Panchayat system’ (Khadka 1986).
The royal takeover faced serious challenges from the Nepali Congress revolutionaries who launched a resistance movement against the king’s decision. Gradually, the Nepali Congress and the Communist Party of Nepal came together to undertake a long, sometimes violent, struggle against Panchayat rule between 1961 and 1975. In 1979, a student movement was launched against the Panchayat system which led to a national referendum in 1980. After the referendum, the Panchayat was able to continue with a marginal majority - 54.8 per cent of the total valid votes counted (Phadnis 1981). In May 1985, the Nepali Congress Party launched a campaign of Satyagraha [civil disobedience] against the Panchayat system and many people were arrested. From early 1990, the Nepali Congress Party and the United Left Front together launched Jana Andolan I [People's Movement I]. Jana Andolan I ended Mahendra’s three decade long Panchayat rule and established a multi-party democracy in April 1990 after the martyrdom of more than 35 people (Karki and Seddon 2003). However, it is clear that many more died. There is no record of how many people were killed during the insurgency against Panchayat rule.

Despite the establishment of multi-party democracy, the country could not take tangible development initiatives because of the vested political and personal interests of the political parties (Dahal 2010; Upreti 2010b). On 13 February 1996, the Maoist Communist Party of Nepal announced a people’s war to carry out the New Democratic Revolution (Karki and Seddon 2003). Before declaring the war, the Maoists had presented a 40-point demand to then Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba, giving the final date for their fulfilment as 17 February 1996. But this was refused. In the beginning, the people’s war drew remarkably little international attention and the conflict was ranked as a low-grade insurgency until 2002 (World Bank 2006). However, after talks between the government and Maoists failed, the conflict increased in severity. The government then imposed a nationwide ‘state of emergency’ in November 2001 (BBC 2010). Because of increasing opposition to the declared state of emergency, the government dissolved the parliament in May 2002 and subsequently dissolved elected local bodies.

As it turned out, the removal of the people’s representatives from all decision-making positions weakened the legitimacy and political base of the government and provided the Maoists with considerable opportunities to expand their activities and support base
Nayak 2007; Dahal 2005). The Maoists gained increased support from people resulting in an intensification of local insurgencies and the acquisition of more extensive control over many local areas. King Gyanendra dismissed the entire government and assumed full executive powers on 01 February 2005 (World Bank 2006; NRC 2005). Gyanendra, the youngest brother of king Birendra, had become king after a massacre in the royal palace on 01 June 2001 in which all members of Birendra’s family: King, Queen, Crown Prince and other relatives, died. The king’s attempt to gain total power brought the political parties together against the king who attempted to quell the protests with excessive force. Conservative reports indicate 18 people were killed and some 4,000 people injured (Amnesty International 2007; HRW 2007). Marking the end of the people’s war, the re-launched Jana Andolan II [People’s Movement II] forced the king to reinstate the dissolved House of Representatives on 24 April 2006 (Amnesty International 2007; Singh et al 2007). Using its newly-acquired sovereign authority, the House of Representatives unanimously passed a motion to curtail the power of the king and declared Nepal a secular state, abolishing its official status as a Hindu Kingdom (OCHA 2006). On 21 November 2006, the new government signed a Brihat Shanti Samjhauta [Comprehensive Peace Agreement, CPA] with the Maoists (HRW 2007; Nepal Monitor 2006). An interim constitution was promulgated and the Maoists entered parliament in January 2007. The Constituent Assembly elections, though twice delayed, were held on 10 April 2008. The first meeting of the Assembly declared Nepal a Federal Democratic Republic.

In summary, Nepal has experienced ongoing civil unrest and various political changes over the last two centuries. The country’s political history has included armed and unarmed insurgencies, many of which led to violent episodes, resulting in the loss of many lives and widespread destruction of property, much of which can never be recovered. Further discussion regarding the relationship of political insurgencies to people’s lives is detailed under the section below titled popular movements and democratisation.

2.3.3. Socio-economic Background

Nepal is divided into five regions: Eastern, Central, Western, Mid-western and Far-western. There are 14 zones, 75 districts, 58 municipalities and 3,915 village
development committees (CBS 2007a). With an average per capita income of around US$ 270 per annum, it is currently one of the poorest countries in the world (HDR 2007/08; WFP 2007; World Bank 2006). Poverty in Nepal is most highly concentrated in rural areas with around 80 per cent of the population living in villages. The main source of livelihood is agriculture (CBS 2002, 1992; Thapa 1995). The agricultural sector contributes only about 40 per cent to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) but is the means of subsistence for 80 per cent of the population. In Nepal, poverty pressure is highest among the Dalits, the Janajatis and the Muslims. About 46 per cent of the Dalits, 44 per cent of the hill Janajatis and 41 per cent of the Muslims are living below the poverty line (World Bank 2006). Because of the high unemployment rate, Nepalese people are compelled to migrate inside and outside the country in search of better employment opportunities (World Bank 2006). Inside the country this usually takes the form of rural to urban migration. The main destinations for out-migration are India, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Malaysia. According to the Nepal Living Standards Survey 2003/04, almost one-third of households received remittances. In more recent years, remittances have made a significant contribution to GDP (Strickland and Byrd 2007).

2.3.4. Culture and its Consequences

Nepal has a diverse tradition of art and culture influenced by religious beliefs. Reflecting its long history, the Kathmandu valley has a great variety of cultural and heritage sites. Along with numerous other historical and religious monuments and festivals of national and international importance, they account in large part for the influx of tourists in the city - which provides a source of revenue for the nation. Many customs and traditions stem from deity worship related to Hinduism and Buddhism. The Kathmandu valley and Lumbini, birth place of Buddha, are the two important cultural heritage sites in Nepal included in the list of UNESCO World Heritage Sites (NTB 2012).

Tradition demands that social obligations be observed at any cost, and these obligations drain the savings of ordinary families in Kathmandu and the countryside. Many poor families are forced to borrow money to maintain these obligations. Moneylenders exploit these obligations and charge exorbitant interest rates, which makes it almost impossible for the poor to repay their debt. This often ends with the money lender
seizing the debtor's land and property, and driving out him and his family who then become homeless (Singh et al 2002). This example serves to illustrate the vulnerability of the poor in Nepal.

2.3.5. Ethnicity, Family and Kinship

Nepal is home to people of a mixture of ethnicities, languages, cultures and religious practices. Although Nepal occupies only 147,181 square kilometres, recent estimates showed that the population of Nepal had reached more than 26 million (CBS 2011). However, the population growth rate has reduced from 2.25 per cent in the 2001 census to 1.4 per cent in the 2011 census (CBS 2011, 2002). It is difficult to estimate the exact number of various ethnic/caste groups or their distribution and population size, because a comprehensive anthropological and linguistic survey has not yet been carried out in Nepal (Dahal 2003). The 2001 census (CBS 2008, 2002) recorded 101 ethnic groups, 93 languages and multiple religions as follows:

a) Ethnicity: Chhetri 15.8 per cent, Bahun-Hill 12.7 per cent, Magar 7.1 per cent, Tharu 6.8 per cent, Tamang 5.6 per cent, Newar 5.5 per cent, Muslim 4.3 per cent, Kami 3.9 per cent, Yadav 3.9 per cent, Rai 2.8 per cent, Gurung 2.4 per cent, Damai/Dholi 1.7 per cent, Limbu 1.6 per cent, Thakuri 1.5 per cent, Sarki 1.4 per cent, Teli 1.3 per cent, Chamar 1.2 per cent, Koiri 1.1 per cent, other (less than 1.0 per cent population) 17.6 per cent, and unspecified 1.8 per cent.

b) Language: Nepali 47.8 per cent, Maithili 12.1 per cent, Bhojpuri 7.4 per cent, Tharu 5.8 per cent, Tamang 5.2 per cent, Newar 3.6 per cent, Magar 3.3 per cent, Awadhi 2.4 per cent, other 9.9 per cent, and unspecified 2.5 per cent.

c) Religion: Hinduism 80.6 per cent, Buddhism 10.7 per cent, Islam 4.2 per cent, Kirat 3.6 per cent and other religions 0.9 per cent.

Despite this great diversity, the Nepalese population can be divided into two major groups: indigenous peoples (Janajatis) and non-indigenous peoples (mostly Caste System Hindus, and Muslims). The National Committee for Development of Nationalities (NCDN 1996) has defined Janajatis as a community which has its own mother tongue and traditional culture and yet does not fall under the conventional Hindu hierarchical caste structure. On the recommendation of that committee, some years ago
the Government of Nepal officially published a list of 59 ethnic groups under the category of Janajatis (HMG 2002). Janajatis account for at least 37 per cent of the Nepalese population (CBS 2008, 2002, 1992). Geographically, 18 Janajatis are from the Mountains (for example, Bhole, Byanshi, Sherpa, Thakali and Walung), 24 from the Hills (for example, Magar, Gurung, Rai, Limbu, Sunuwar, Raute and Tamang), and 17 from the Terai (for example, Tharu, Dhimal, Gangain, Satar, Jhangar, Koche and Meche). Historically, many of these Janajati groups used to occupy a particular territory and thus, many of them claim that they are the true Adivasis [First Settlers] of Nepal (Dahal 2003). Even today, Gurungs and Magars are located mainly in Western Nepal; Rais and Limbus are in Eastern Nepal; and Tamangs are in Central Nepal. For the purpose of research in this thesis, Nepalese people who are not Janajatis are considered as non-indigenous peoples. The non-indigenous peoples are scattered throughout the country and are less than two-thirds of the Nepalese population (CBS 2008). Non-indigenous peoples include Bahun-Chhetris, Marwadis, Yadavs, Kamis, Damais, Sarkis, Charmars, Muslims, and so on. Within this category, the socio-cultural practices of various groups are clearly distinct, for example, between the residents of the hills and the Terai [plains]. Those who fall under the Hindu caste system can be divided into two groups: (a) high caste Hindus or Bahun-Chhetris, and (b) low caste Hindus or Dalits.

As Nepalese society is multi-ethnic, and there are many cultural and social practices resulting in larger family size, ethnic groups usually live as extended families. Data shows that the average family/household size has always been larger than 5 and the 2001 census reported the average family/household size as 5.4 (Kayastha and Shrestha 2003). Wedding customs in Nepal vary according to ethnic groups and castes, and whether the family is rural or urban. Traditionally, marriages are arranged by the parents of the girl and boy, whether the prospective bridal partners know each other or not. Traditional marriage customs are still practised in villages, but less in the cities nowadays where a mix of ‘love’ matches and ‘arranged’ marriage is common. Although ethnic groups in Nepal generally practise group-endogamy and clan-exogamy, there are now also some practices of group-exogamy, especially for the urban population.

For this study, the comparison is between one indigenous ethnic group (Tamangs) and a non-indigenous ethnic group (Bahun-Chhetris). The following paragraphs provide descriptions of the Tamangs and the Bahun-Chhetris.
The Tamangs

It is believed that the Tamangs originally came from Tibet many centuries ago. In historic inscriptions dating as far back as the third century, Tamangs were described as an ancient powerful civilization that later threatened the reign of King Bumlde Mgon (NEFIN 2005). Although the word Tamang was used many centuries ago to denote an ethnic group in the area of Nepal, following the expansion of the Gorkhali kingdom the word was prohibited and the Tamangs were included in ‘Bhote’ [Tibetan Dweller] (Limbu 2005; Bhattachan 2003; Whelpton 1997). This meant that Gorkhali rulers considered them as foreigners despite the fact that the Tamangs were the first settlers in Central Nepal. However, the Tamangs have always called themselves ‘Tamang’. The Government of Nepal officially listed ‘the Tamangs’ as one of the ethnic groups in the census 1991 (CBS 2002).

The Tamangs are Mongoloids and traditionally lived in the hilly region between the Budhi Gandaki River in the west and the Likhu River in the east (Shrestha 2002; Bista 1967). Although the Tamangs are scattered in all districts of Nepal, they live in the largest numbers in the hill districts surrounding the Kathmandu valley (CBS 2002). They are also found outside Nepal in large numbers in Darjeeling, Sikkim, Assam and Nagaland in India; and in small communities in Burma, Bhutan and other countries. The total enumerated population of Tamangs in Nepal in 2001 was 1,282,304. The Tamang language occupies fifth place in the country and first place among Tibeto-Burman languages, in terms of the number of speakers speaking any one language (CBS 2002).

There are more than 100 ‘ruis’ [subgroups] of Tamangs, and inter-marriage does not occur within the same subgroup. Although inter-marriage can occur between a boy, say belonging to the ‘Yonjan’ subgroup, and a girl belonging to the ‘Waiba’ subgroup, if the mother of both the boy and girl belong to the same subgroup, marriage between them is prohibited because they are socially recognised as the son and daughter of the same mother (March 2002). There is also a practice of marrying one's maternal uncle's and aunt's cousins. A Tamang woman’s rui does not change after marriage unlike a Hindu woman. A Tamang woman remains in her parental
subgroup her entire life; and when she dies, the body cannot be disposed of without the presence and permission of her brothers (NEFIN 2005).

In the areas where the Tamangs are the major ethnic group, they live in settled agricultural villages divided into toles [lineage-based hamlets]. Tamangs used to control kipat [tracts of commonly owned land], appointing a village headman to arbitrate disputes and manage the land (NEFIN 2005). This particular tradition was dissolved by the Panchayat state land reform during the 1960s. Each Tamang village has one or more Bombos [shamans - usually one for each tole] who recite oral texts and conduct rites to honour ancestors and to celebrate festivals and ceremonies (Hofer 1997, 1981; Holmberg 1989). The Tamangs also have Lamas who command Tibetan scripture, especially for rituals after death. The Tamangs are mainly Buddhists, and their language belongs to the Tibeto-Burman family (NEFIN 2005).

The Bahun-Chhetris

The Bahun-Chhetris are Caucasians and Indo-Aryan. The Bahun-Chhetri grouping in the context of this thesis is a group of hill high caste Hindus that includes Bahuns, Chhetris, Thakuris and Sanyasis. They account for nearly 31 per cent of the Nepalese population (CBS 2002). In the 2001 census, the Chhetris and the Bahuns occupied the first and the second position in the national population. The Bahuns or Brahmins are a higher caste than the others. However, they share many similarities. The Gorkhali rulers considered Bahun-Chhetris to be the highest caste (Dahal 2003). They are found all over the country but have rarely settled above 6,000 feet.

It is believed that the Bahun-Chhetris migrated from India at different times (Thapa 1995). They follow Hinduism and their social practices depend upon Hindu religious epics. They speak Nepali but use Sanskrit scriptures. The distinct cultural features (Dahal 2003) are:

a) hierarchical structure (one group is placed at the top, with others lower)
b) hereditary basis of membership
c) endogamy (marrying within one’s own cultural group)
d) purity and pollution restrictions that govern the day-to-day life of people
Farming, teaching, politics and government service are their main occupations. The Bahuns add to their income by acting as family priests. The literary and priestly traditions of the Bahun-Chhetris have facilitated them to take important roles in modern Nepalese government, education, business, and almost everywhere (Dahal 2003). While some are poor, socially and politically they have profited from privileged access to education and to jobs which earn a significant income (Huntington 2002). Despite the fact that some of these people do live in the rural areas, including the hills, their power base is in the cities and the Terai. Other people see the Bahun-Chhetris as being Kathmandu-centric, and intent on excluding all other groups from control of, and access to, resources and opportunities in Nepal (Huntington 2002).

It is clear from the above descriptions that the Tamangs and the Bahun-Chhetris represent two distinct groups which together account for a significant proportion of the Nepalese population. Some may argue that the categorisation of these two groups does not necessarily address the issues of ethnicity and identity in fine detail. However, that is not the purpose here. The aim is to say something about the engagement with armed political insurgency of a group of indigenous marginalised rural people in comparison to a non-indigenous privileged ethnic group of rural people.

2.4. People’s Movements and Relevant Studies

2.4.1. Subaltern Studies

Traditionally, the roles played by rural people in the process of making histories or bringing changes in a state governance system have been under-stated, and under-researched. The ‘subaltern studies’ approach was developed to address this invisibility. Historical and anthropological methods have been used to draw out stories of resistance and protest from peasants or subordinated people living in rural areas (Sivaramakrishnan 1995).

The term ‘subaltern’ was adapted from the writings of Antonio Gramsci (1891 – 1937). In his work *The Prison Notebooks* Gramsci identifies the subaltern classes as those
subordinated by the hegemony of the ruling class control of the state (Ludden 2002). Subaltern classes are those groups excluded from any meaningful role in a regime of power. Gramsci was really talking about workers but since his theoretical framework became popular, the term has been used for other groups which are excluded in that the people in them do not have a position from which to speak. According to Ludden (2002), Gramsci wove ideas about subaltern identity into his theories of class struggle, and the term subaltern is synonymous with ‘proletariat’ (Khair 2001). For the purposes of this research, the term subaltern means those who have little access to representing themselves. In this thesis the voices of subordinated and/or rural people are heard, particularly in regard to their engagement with the people’s war.

According to Chaturvedi (2000), subaltern studies was a promise to write histories from ‘below’ built on a conceptualisation of the post-colonial experience. Firstly, Susohbhan Sarkar, the eminent 20th century Bengali historian, created an important intellectual influence by discussing Gramsci’s work with his students and publishing _The Thought of Gramsci_ in 1968. Secondly, writers from Britain and other European countries used Gramsci’s concepts to examine peasant societies and released publications, for example: Eric Hobsbawm’s _Primitive Rebels_. Thirdly, there were political developments in India. For example, Ranajit Guha, who went on to take the founding chair in subaltern studies, was actively involved with Maoist student organisations. Gramsci’s conceptual framework of resistance and struggle from ‘below’, was taken up as a framework for writing subaltern studies that dealt with ‘politics of the people’ - studying rural resistance and protest from the grassroots viewpoint (Sivaramakrishnan 1995). Within a decade of continuous work by the ‘Subalternists’, subaltern studies had emerged as a new specialised discipline in post-colonial theory and cultural studies (Chaturvedi 2000).

Although subaltern studies began in India, it is relevant to Nepal since Nepal is also a South Asian country. South Asian countries in a bi-polar world represent the second pole in the pairs, for example, East in the ‘West and East’, Third World in the ‘First and Third World’ and poor in the ‘rich and poor’ (Ludden 2002). The single most important lesson learnt from the subaltern method is to focus on the particular forms of rural people’s subjectivity and experience (Sivaramakrishnan 1995). The theme of ‘history from below’ used in subaltern studies is relevant to the current study, firstly because the
people’s war was a mass movement of resistance against the government; secondly because it allows the voices of rural people to be heard, and thirdly because this thesis allows the voices of the Tamangs, a subordinate rural group, to be heard on the topic of their engagement or otherwise with this war of resistance.

2.4.2. Ethnicity and Ethnographic Studies

The term ‘ethnicity’ as defined above was first used by the sociologist David Riesman in 1953 (Guneratne 2002). It is a relatively modern idea and it has been argued that modernisation itself enables the existence of ethnic identity (Guneratne 2002). Ethnic identity is a kind of imagined community (see Anderson 1990), an entity larger than a village. Its members do not know most of their fellow-members, nor do they have communication with each other. Arguments on the concept of ethnicity are bifurcated: some (for example, Shills 1957) believe ethnicity to be a primordial and natural entity attributed to the tie of blood; and others (for example, Fisher 2001) view ethnicity as historically contingent - shaped by the material and social forces of a given historical period. The primordial view of ethnicity presumes the biological unity of ethnic groups who retain a common culture fundamentally unchanged over centuries (Guneratne 2002). In contrast, Fisher (2001) argues that ethnicity is a social construction in which the past is re-invented. It is not a simple cultural given defined by primordial evidence such as language, dress, social organization, religion and so on. For Guneratne (2002) ethnic identity is created through the purposeful activities of dominant classes or elites who define the ethnicity of others for political purposes. Although the term ethnicity seems to be simple, the concept is very complex and much debated, and never more so than in relation to Nepal.

Studies of ethnicity and ethnic groups in Nepal are dependent on the ethnographer’s interest. The pioneering ethnographers concentrated their studies in the Himalayas and nearby valleys and foothills. They focused on an ethnic group or tribe or caste, exploring location, language, and religion (see Fisher’s 2007 discussion). In recent years, ethnographic studies on Nepalese have been advanced in their approach and have covered many ethnic groups living throughout the country. Some notable publications of this kind are, for example, Fisher’s Fluid Boundaries: Forming and Transforming Identity in Nepal (2001); Guneratne’s Many Tongues, One People: The Making of

Fluid Boundaries is based on almost twenty years of contact by William F. Fisher with the Thakalis in Nepal. It is an ethnographic study rooted in personal experience in Thaksatsae, Khani Khuwa, Kathmandu, Butwal, Bhairawa and Pokhara (Fisher 2001). Guneratnne’s book is based on research conducted from November 1989 to May 1991 in Pipariya village in the Chitwan district with additional research in the field in 1997, 1998 and 1999. The book is an account of the making of ethnic identity among culturally distinct and historically separate people who share a common ethnonym ‘Tharu’ and inhabit an area of the Himalayan foothills (Guneratne 2002). Both Holmberg and March conducted research for many years in Nepal with the Tamangs in the mid-hills area surrounding Kathmandu. In summary, Guneratne and Fisher explored processes of building and transforming ethnic identity, whereas Holmberg and March described socio-cultural and ethnic dimensions of selected ethnic groups. Most studies on ethnicity and ethnic groups in Nepal are carried out by outsiders; by foreign scholars. This study is unique in that it is being carried out by a local researcher – a Tamang - under the intensive guidance of foreign scholars with many years of experience of research in developing countries.

It should be noted that neither Fisher nor Guneratne explained why ethnic identity issues had arisen in their field sites (see the discussion in Fisher 2007). The current study contextualises the investigation by comparing the experiences of two major ethnic groups in Nepal, relevant to the impact of the political insurgency and violence. In contrast to past studies, the current study explains ethnic identity issues in an insecure political environment.

2.4.3. Popular Movements and Democratisation

From the second half of the 18th century when King Prithvi Narayan Shah started to expand his Gorkha principality by unifying a number of small kingdoms, the people of Nepal have often had to fight for sovereignty, unity and democracy. The events that came to a head in 1951, 1990 and 2006 (Hachhethu et al 2008; Brown 1996) can be
grouped together as ‘Popular Movements for Democratisation in Nepal’, meaning that significant numbers of people participated in, or supported, these events. In the section above, ‘An Account of Political Insurgencies’, an overview has already been given. The discussion below is focused around the three major popular movements that were relatively successful in establishing people’s sovereignty and democracy at some level.

2.4.3.1 The End of Rana Autocracy

The first popular movement that resulted in the introduction of a democratic system in Nepal was led by the Nepali Congress, a rightist political party that was founded in 1946 (Singh et al 2002). This popular movement for democracy ended the Rana autocracy that had ruled over the Nepalese people for 104 years. Before this movement took hold in Nepal, most anti-Rana activity had taken place in India among intellectuals from the bureaucratic and landowning classes (Brown 1996). Various groups or political parties were formed, including the All India Gorkha League in 1921, Nepal Praja Parisad in 1936, the Nepali National Congress in 1947, and the Communist Party of Nepal in 1949. The ending of the Rana autocracy became possible after the Mukti Sena [Liberation Army] of the Nepali Congress captured more than 50 per cent of Nepal’s territory. Subsequently, King Tribhuvan sought asylum in India, and India aided the formation of a tripartite power-sharing coalition government comprising of the Rana, the Congress and the King (Hachhethu et al 2008; Ganguly and Shoup 2005; Brown 1996). In fact, the movement ended before it reached its logical conclusion of a democracy because the tripartite agreement among the Rana, the Congress and the King was not democratic.

2.4.3.2 Jana Andolan I

Similarly, the second popular movement, Jana Andolan I was also led by the Nepali Congress in conjunction with the United Left Front (Ganguly and Shoup 2005). The Andolan in 1990 was successful in establishing a multi-party democratic system with a ‘constitutional monarchy’, thus ending three decades of the unitary Panchayat system (Singh et al 2002). However, the new political system established by Jana Andolan in 1990 failed to alter the lives of ordinary people because the structure and distribution of power and wealth remained largely undisturbed and the public domain was still
dominated by high caste Hindus and other elites (Brown 1996). In fact, many people’s rights were suppressed which eventually fuelled the ‘people’s war’ led by the Maoists, one of the leftist political parties in Nepal.

It is generally understood that Communists who are influenced by Marxism, Leninism and Maoism are in favour of a republic. However, it has always been quite confusing in Nepal because it has been difficult to distinguish between those who were ‘true’ Communists and those whose struggle was really for the establishment of a republic. In the history of the Nepalese Communist movement, a faction of Communist sympathisers led by Puspa Kamal Dahal (alias Prachanda) rejected the Multi-Party Democratic Constitution of 1991 because they considered that the monarchical constitution was inadequate for a genuine democracy (Karki and Seddon 2003). The same Communist faction, later known as the Maoists, continued to demand a constituent assembly for writing a people’s constitution and establishing a people’s republic. Eventually, the Maoists pushed forward a people’s war in 1996.

The people’s war from 1996 to 2006 affected everyone in Nepal directly or indirectly. The war is said to have claimed the lives of 13,236 people (INSEC 2010a). However, these are only the official figures and the casualties are probably much higher than the formal records suggest. Livelihoods in the rural villages deteriorated because the conflict affected household work; increased household expenses; affected personal safety; increased domestic conflict and violence; and forced local people to leave their homes, thus increasing insecurity and uncertainty (Singh et al 2002). The fear of being press-ganged by the Maoists or targeted by the government security forces caused a significant number of rural men aged from 15-40 years, to migrate to ‘safe areas’ (Smith 2002). Some moved to nearby towns and district capitals, others to Kathmandu and Pokhara (Huntington 2002). No reliable figures exist on the number of people internally displaced due to the conflict, perhaps more than 200,000. The seriousness of the human rights crisis and the displacement were not acknowledged adequately at the time (Amnesty International 2007; NRC 2005).

Most people still in the villages had nowhere to go. Some were attracted by the Maoist propaganda on poverty, and unemployed youths were recruited (Singh et al 2002). Education was the social service sector most affected. Many young students were lured
or abducted by the Maoists; local schoolteachers were constantly under pressure to contribute to the people’s war fund (Singh et al 2002; Smith 2002), and it was often not safe to attend school. Health services also suffered. In conflict-affected areas, health workers faced harassment, intimidation and interference by the security forces and the Maoists when carrying out their duties, and they were vulnerable to suspicion from either side (DHSP 2003). The Maoist insurgents demanded large donations from major business, industries and development projects (Singh et al 2002), affecting their viability as enterprises. Accessibility to the courts was hindered, creating a barrier to justice (AHRC 2005). During the ten years of the war, the security situation was further worsened by the actions of King Gyanendra in usurping power through two coups: in 2002 he dissolved parliament, and in February 2005 he took over chairing the cabinet (Hachhethu et al 2008).

2.4.3.3 Jana Andolan II

The Maoist insurgency and the King’s grab for power left the other political parties no space to take action. The Seven-Party-Alliance (SPA) was formed by the other major political parties under the leadership of Girija Prasad Koirala, the president of the Nepali Congress Party. In the final stages of the war the SPA endorsed the Maoist demand for an election of the constituent assembly and the Maoists agreed to support the Jana Andolan II in 2006. It was launched by the SPA with a commitment to multi-party democracy and peaceful politics. In April 2006, Jana Andolan II forced the king to announce the people’s sovereignty and re-establish the dissolved parliament. The decade-long Maoist insurgency was officially ended after the government signed a Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) with the Maoists in November 2006 (Hachhethu et al 2008). On 28 May 2008, Nepal became a Federal Democratic Republic.

In summary, the first popular movement was to establish democratic rule; the second movement was for the re-establishment of democracy; and the third movement was aimed at ending the autocratic monarchy and establishing a people’s rule that acknowledged the diversity of the Nepalese population. Yet, we know relatively little about how ordinary people experienced any of these major civil violence events. Despite various contributions from many scholars, our knowledge of the course of
revolutions in Nepal is limited. The current study aims to fill that gap by looking at the civil war and its aftermath. It is hard to predict the future. It does seem certain though that peace and democracy in Nepal will be institutionalised only if desired social change and development is achieved and the fruits of democracy reach the majority of the people, not just those in power and the wealthy elite.

2.4.4. Social Change and Development

Movements for the institutionalisation of the democracy over the last century, though led primarily by the well-educated elites and middle class people, raised the expectations of ordinary Nepalis for sustained development and social change. It has been argued that the five major reasons behind the escalation of the conflict were: economic disparities, political frustrations, the crisis in government, the denial of justice, and poverty (Singh et al 2002). Nepalese people strongly believe that ‘politics’ is mainly responsible for the poverty, under-development and development of the nation. They perceive that ‘destructive politics’ like that of the Panchayat and Rana regimes resulted in the country's economy going downhill. They consequently believe that ‘constructive politics’ like that of the multi-party system common in western democracies, will not only stop further deterioration, but boost the economy (Bhattachan 1994).

Nepalese people know very well who is excluded and who is included in the national political system that governs every aspect of everyday life. A recent study showed that the high castes from the hills (Bahun-Chhetris) are generally perceived as included, and others - like Dalits, Janajatis, Madhesis, Muslims and women - are considered as excluded (Hachhethu et al 2008). According to Gurung (2006), in Nepal the dominance of the higher caste group and the exclusion of other groups is everywhere reflected: in education, in administration and in the economy. For example, among those with higher education 73.8 per cent are higher caste but only 22 per cent are Janajatis. The proportion of successful candidates for bureaucratic positions was 69.3 per cent for higher caste applicants but only 3 per cent for Janajatis. Men from higher castes dominate almost all occupations such as professional/technical (62.2 per cent) and legislative/administrative (58.3 per cent) positions (Gurung 2006).
During the past five decades, Nepal’s development efforts did not reach the poor. Indeed it can be argued that they contributed to an increase in distributional inequality (Sharma 2006). Although a government study found that poverty in Nepal was reduced by 11 per cent between 1996 and 2004, the level of poverty of Bahun-Chhetris had been reduced by 46 per cent, while that of Dalits was reduced by only 21 per cent, and that of Janajatis only by 10 per cent (NPC 2007). Moreover, according to figures available from the National Living Standards Survey (NLSS) in 2003/04, 64 per cent of males and 39 per cent of females in the country were literate, whereas the Tamangs, among the most vulnerable Janajatis, had the lowest overall literacy rate of 34 per cent (NIRS 2006). Despite living close to the Kathmandu valley throughout centuries, the Tamangs’ social, economic and political conditions are worse compared to other cultural groups (Dahal 2003). Moreover, in all castes and Janajatis, the position of women is relatively lower than that of men (NPC 2007). A significant gap remains in development outcomes between dominant and dominated groups.

One of the significant changes that appeared after the re-establishment of multi-party democracy in the 1990s was that most Nepalese, even those living in rural areas, increasingly saw themselves as holding sovereign rights (Bennett 2005). Moreover, people became aware of gendered power relationships between males and females. Gender issues drew the attention of scholars, professionals, politicians, policy makers and the public (Poudel and Luintel 2003). The women’s movement forced the government to incorporate gender equality and justice issues into the national agenda (Bennett 2005). Later, during the civil war, women broke some deep-rooted traditions by participating in the Maoist army and political cadres. 70 per cent of women guerrillas in the Maoist army were from indigenous communities (World Bank 2004). A recent study showed that the Nepalese people recognise that the Maoists, more than other political parties, were and still are working in favour of excluded groups (Hachhethu et al 2008).

Debates over exclusion have raised issues of identities based on ethnicity and regionalism (Hachhethu et al 2008). Dalits are now well-organised and have begun to challenge Nepal’s caste society. Janajatis are united and have raised fair ethnic representation issues in the state structure (Bennett 2005). This seems timely. Recent political developments in Nepal have continued to include Bahun-Chhetris of Terai
origin in the power centres but have kept largely women, ethnic minorities and Dalits far away from the mainstream. Bennett (2005) expects that in the near future different social and economic groups who share at least some common change objectives will form coalitions to bring about desired change processes in Nepal. The new regime of post-conflict Nepal promises change. It is too early to argue negatively about expected changes and development opportunities, however, recent activities of political parties have certainly not embraced the traditionally excluded groups.

2.5. People’s Wellbeing and Basic Social Services

The wellbeing of ordinary people and basic social services suffered greatly during the insurgency. Figure 2.1 shows two examples.

Figure 2.1: A school building and a police post

A well maintained school which received funding from an international organisation. The Maoists took away a part of the fund. A police post which was destroyed by the Maoists. The post moved to a safer place and did not re-establish again.

In western countries, basic social services are taxation-funded benefits and facilities provided by a government for its citizens, such as education, health care, food subsidies, income support, legal representation and law-enforcement agencies such as police. As a separate factor, livelihood opportunities in developed countries refer to the capacities of local people to get access to the things that directly sustain them, such as income and food. However, in most developing countries, as far as projects and initiatives are concerned, this distinction is not made. Livelihood opportunities are perceived as part of basic social services in developing countries because they have to do with sustainable
agriculture or local employment opportunities that provide the means for a family to survive.

2.5.1. Basic Social Services and Nepal

Following the United Nations Millennium Summit held in 2000 and the declaration of the time-bound and quantified Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), basic social services have received more emphasis, and seven of the eight MDGs are directly related to them. The relevant MDGs are:

1) Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger  
2) Achieve universal primary education  
3) Promote gender equality and empower women  
4) Reduce child mortality  
5) Improve maternal health  
6) Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases  
7) Develop a global partnership for development  

(GON and UNDP 2006).

Nepal has committed to achieving these goals by implementing various activities; and in general, progress seems to be satisfactory (GON and UNDP 2006). For example, the average life expectancy of the Nepalese people has reached 62 years. The life expectancy is higher for females than for males; however, it is five years less for Dalit women than for other women (NPC 2007). Notably, an analytical study carried out in 2006 showed that basic social services are not available and accessible to a large proportion of the Nepalese population especially Janajatis and Dalits (NIRS 2006).

2.5.2. Health and Wellbeing

In general, the health and wellbeing of the Nepalese people is not good. On average, 13 per cent of the total population reported being sick or injured during a given 30 day period (NIRS 2006). Of the total sick or injured around 34 per cent did not consult a health practitioner. The proportion of people within the Janajati group that did not consult any practitioner - 40 per cent - was higher than the national average (NIRS
Most people suffering acute illness (36 per cent) consulted paramedic staff; while those consulting doctors were only 26 per cent of reported cases. In the beginning of 2007, for the purpose of providing modern health care services, there were 89 hospitals, 186 primary health centres, 699 health posts, and 3,131 sub-health posts scattered throughout Nepal (CBS 2007a). In addition to modern health care services, many Nepalese visit traditional treatment places until they are cured completely.

The Maoist insurgency in Nepal affected health care services in rural Nepal, making the situation of marginalised people more difficult. Sonal Singh (2004) reported that hundreds of community health posts had been destroyed, dozens of health care workers had lost their lives, and many had fled their posts since the beginning of the conflict. In addition to the lack of health care providers in rural health care facilities, the distribution of essential commodities and drugs proved extremely difficult or impossible to maintain, and cold-chain delivery of vaccines was not sustainable (Singh 2004). The Maoists often forced international aid-funded development organisations to leave remote areas and the government put several administrative restrictions on the working process of development organisations in Nepal, including those providing health services.

In short, it seems that the modern health care system was considerably affected by the Maoist insurgency, with a negative impact on rural people's health and wellbeing. Yet, during the period of the civil war, rural people continued to visit both modern and traditional health care outlets to some extent.

2.5.3. Education

Expansion of educational structures in Nepal began only in the latter half of the 20th century (Stash and Hannum 2001). Schools in Nepal are basically categorised as pre-primary, primary (grades 1-5), lower secondary (grades 6-8), secondary (grades 9-10), and higher secondary (10+2). By the end of 2006, there were 27,901 primary schools, 8,880 lower secondary schools and 5,329 secondary schools offering senior years of study (CBS 2007a). The expansion of schools is a positive impact of the various constitutions of Nepal that have proclaimed education as a right for every Nepalese.
Stash and Hannum (2001) acknowledge that growth in literacy rates indicates positive outcomes from educational expansion in Nepal. The literacy rate increased from 23 per cent in 1980 to 54 per cent in 2001 (CBS 2007a). However, as mentioned above, the literacy rate for the Tamangs was only 34 per cent, the lowest rate among the Hill Janajatis (NIRS 2006). In general, universal primary education is close to achievement but there is highly inadequate provision of secondary education in many areas. Figures at the national level show that only 3.5 per cent of the population attained education above a Bachelors Degree and only 16 per cent graduated from senior secondary school. The proportion that attained higher education in both the Hill Janajati and Dalit population cohorts was lower than the national figure (NIRS 2006).

The government claims that the useability of education should be a priority in educational planning and policy in Nepal. Signalling its commitment to 'The World Declaration on Education for All' in 1990 and to the MDGs in 2000, Nepal has given priority to ‘life skills’ education in its policies and programs (MOES 2003). However, parents and children in Nepal expect education primarily as a means of securing a job (CERID 2006), which implies job skills rather than life skills. In Nepal there is a discrepancy between the concept of life skills education in the guiding documents, and actual labour force needs, resulting in a skewed policy emphasis and program development mismatch.

According to an assessment report, the Maoist insurgency posed a major challenge to achieving the MDG for education, threatening progress already made and potentially hindering further progress (World Bank 2006). The report counted, as an example, 78 teachers who were made to alter their teaching to suit Maoist ideology. Similarly, the UN Secretary General’s Report to the Security Council stated that widespread strikes and blockades carried out by armed and unarmed groups and political parties had disrupted humanitarian activities, and access to health and education services in Nepal (UNSC 2008). Although the conflict does not appear to have so far significantly hindered overall education gains in the country, the documented negative impacts on students and teachers, and the migration of children to urban areas, suggests that even though it is now over, the long-term effects of the insurgency may pose risks to further improvements in educational attainments (World Bank 2006).
Ahearn (2004) argues that literacy can be both a catalyst for social change and a result of numerous other types of social transformation. Nepal needs to increase literacy levels if it is to flourish as a nation. Evidence shows that high-quality education is critical for the sustained social and economic development of nations (Schafer 1999). However, it seems that Nepal lags far behind in providing high quality education, and in achieving essential higher education outcomes.

2.5.4. Economy, Work and Income Opportunities

Nepal has remained one of the poorest countries in the world. According to National account figures for the years 2000/01 to 2006/07, the growth of real per capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has been very small over the years, and even negative in some years. The growth of per capita GDP is estimated at only 0.53 per cent in the year 2006/07 (CBS 2007b). Savada (1991) observed limited industrialization, unemployment and particularly underemployment as continuous problems in Nepal. A survey carried out by the National Planning Commission in 1977 reported unemployment to be 5.6 per cent in rural areas and almost 6 per cent in urban areas. More recent estimates showed that the unemployment rate was gradually increasing in the country, with an unemployment rate of 8 per cent in 2001 (Shrestha 2005). Shrestha (2005) reveals that more females were underemployed compared to males. In 2007, the National Planning Commission documented that the labour force participation rate among women was 48.9 per cent and among men was 67.6 per cent. Most women were engaged in informal or subsistence work, domestic wage earning, and care-taking jobs (NPC 2007).

The ten year conflict has certainly affected the national economy negatively. Pyakuryal and Uprety (2005) revealed an 8 to 10 per cent loss of GDP between 1997 and 2003. The same period saw a re-allocation of resources from the development portfolio to portfolios directly relevant to the conflict - police, military and reconstruction services. The security budget was increased from just 5 per cent in 1999 to 18 per cent in 2006 (Shrestha and Dahal 2007). The national economy has been so badly affected by the political conflict that it will take a long time to reconcile and recover.
2.6. Conclusion

Nepal has emerged as the youngest ‘Federal Democratic Republic’ in the 21st century. An ancient system of monarchy ended and a new era has begun. This chapter has given an overview of the long journey that Nepal had passed through to reach its current form as a nation. Although the sections of discussion frame past events, the purpose of this thesis is generation of useful knowledge for the present and the future. Analysis of the experiences of the people’s war - 1996 to 2006 - may allow the country to learn the lessons of history.

Taking the subaltern studies theme of ‘history from below’, this thesis focuses on rural people’s subjectivity and experiences of oppression, survival, protest and resistance. It is obvious that relatively little is known about how ordinary Nepalese people experienced the people’s war. It is hoped to advance knowledge of the course of revolutions in relation to contemporary Nepal.

Nepal is home to people of a mixture of ethnicities, languages, cultures and religious practices. Discussions in this chapter clarified that Tamangs and Bahun-Chhetris are two distinct ethnic groups which together account for a significant proportion of the population. The former is a marginalised group and the latter is a more privileged group. The study contrasts their experiences of the armed political insurgency.

In summary, this chapter has analysed context and knowledge within the field mapped out by ethnicity, insurgencies and social services in Nepal. Issues of gender and economic opportunities have been taken as cross-cutting themes. Survival strategies have been identified as a theme not addressed by previous studies. The existing knowledge and the gaps discussed in this chapter are directly related to the aim of the project - to explore experiences of how the political insurgencies have impinged on, and sometimes transformed, the everyday life of rural people during a period of political and societal upheaval in Nepal. The next chapter deals with the research methodology of the thesis.
Chapter 3. Methodology

3.1. Introduction

This study explores the strategies, consequences, gender roles, transformations and the meaning of livelihoods of rural community members in Nepal during the civil war. It includes a comparative study of two groups: a) the Tamangs - a marginalised group, and one of the indigenous peoples of Nepal; and b) the Bahun-Chhetris - the privileged group and one of the non-indigenous peoples of Nepal. The study is, therefore, in part an account of the involvement and experiences of a dominant, and a dominated community in the context of a civil war.

Crow (1997) argues that dominated and exploited classes may be politically passive and fatalistic rather than actively challenging their disadvantaged situation. However, this is not always the case. Historically, there is no great evidence to support the view that unequal societies are forced to change simply by virtue of being unequal. People need to be credibly informed about their situation before they can organise to bring about change. In relation to this argument, this study aimed to generate empowering knowledge in the new Nepalese context of a Federal Republic. A particular kind of methodological approach is implied by this aim.

In the following sections, an overview of the research process and the qualitative approach are discussed. Also in this chapter, the study population and sample size are described; participant selection and data collection methods are explained; and reflections of the researcher in relation to the study populations are presented.

3.2. Research Process

The research questions drove the research process in this thesis (Silverman 2005). A qualitative approach was chosen to obtain depth in the data, so interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs) and family case studies were used to obtain information from informants in rural areas affected by the insurgency.
Types of research processes can be broadly divided into three categories: the purpose of the research; the kind of information to be collected; and the time period of the project (Babbie 2004; Cresswell 2003). Babbie (2004) identified three common purposes of social science research: exploration, description and explanation. Exploratory studies examine a new interest; descriptive studies describe a phenomenon using scientific observations; and explanatory studies answer the question of why a given situation exists. This study is exploratory in that research of exactly this kind has not been previously conducted, and certainly not in the context of the new Federal Republic in Nepal. The presentation of findings is descriptive but also explanatory, seeking to explain both contrasting and similar experiences of engagement with the armed civil conflict.

Cresswell (2003) divided research approaches into three groups: quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods. He states that a qualitative approach is one in which the researcher often makes knowledge claims about data based on a constructivist perspective, or an advocacy/participatory perspective, or both. Questions such as ‘what is X, how does X vary in different circumstances, and why’ are answered by a qualitative research approach (Pope and Mays 2006). In contrast, a quantitative approach is one in which the researcher uses positivist/post-positivist claims for developing knowledge from data (Cresswell 2003). O’Cathain and Thomas (2006) agree with this distinction and mention that typically, quantitative methods are associated with positivism and ideas about an objective social reality; while qualitative methods constitute subjective meanings involving interpretivism and ideas about the social reality of being. In a mixed methods approach a researcher collects and analyses both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study. The proposed study is primarily qualitative in nature as far as primary data goes; however, some quantitative data from secondary sources have also been used.

Based on the time dimension, research can be cross-sectional or longitudinal. Cross-sectional studies examine a phenomenon that is made at one point in time; and longitudinal studies analyse a phenomenon over an extended period of time (Babbie 2004). The proposed study is cross-sectional in that primary interview data were collected over a relatively short period of time. However, there is a longitudinal
component because the study explores people’s experiences of the conflict during a decade.

3.3. Qualitative Research Interviews

In qualitative research an interview can be defined as an interaction between an interviewer and an interviewee in which the researcher has a plan of inquiry (see Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2006; Babbie 2004). It is a ‘formal’ qualitative research method and the researcher controls the process of the interaction according to the themes of the inquiry (Babbie 2004; Nilan 2002).

Qualitative methodology allows the researcher to probe the deep interpersonal meanings of social practice. For example, a qualitative interview flows like a conversation, it is flexible for gaining a depth of understanding, and it is ‘powerful’ for digging out information from research participants (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2006; Babbie 2004). However, the researcher should be cautious in analysing qualitative data because sometimes people do not do what they say they do (Britten 2006). As an example of qualitative methodology, interviews may be unstructured, semi-structured and structured (Britten 2006; DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree 2006). DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) argue that unstructured interviews were used by early ethnographers and later, FGDs and more structured in-depth interview techniques emerged from different disciplines and traditions.

Given that the research questions implied a qualitative methodology approach, the study used FGDs and in-depth interviews. As both of these methods are ‘formal’ qualitative research methods (Babbie 2004; Nilan 2002), the student researcher controlled the process of interactions according to research questions. He also carried out extended family case studies, informal conversations and observations. These processes focused on ‘getting lived experiences and perspectives of people’ (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2006, p 144) in the context of the civil war in Nepal.
3.3.1. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

In simple terms, a FGD is a kind of interview with multiple respondents together (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2006). Kitzinger (2006) maintains that FGDs are a form of group interview that capitalises on communication between researcher and research participants to generate data. She argues that, although group interviews are often employed simply as a quick and convenient way to collect data from several people, true FGDs are explicitly designed to capitalise on group interaction to provide distinctive types of data. FGDs can be used as follow up to in-depth interviews or vice versa (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2006). With due consideration of these facts, the study used FGDs to explore people’s overall experience of the conflict in the communities.

3.3.2. In-depth Interviews

According to DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006), the in-depth interview is meant to be a personal and intimate encounter. A researcher employs in-depth interviews using open, direct, verbal questions to stimulate detailed narratives and stories. For in-depth interviews, Britten (2006) argues that it is vital to check that the researchers have understood respondents’ meanings instead of relying on their own assumptions. Therefore, it is very important that the respondent does most of the talking (Babbie 2004). A qualitative interview covers questions on various characteristics such as behaviour, experience and opinion (Britten 2006). The in-depth interview technique employed in this study directly addressed these important methodological considerations.

3.3.3. Extended Family Case Studies

A case is a phenomenon chosen to develop full understanding of that phenomenon and a case can be simple or complex (Silverman 2005; Stake 2000). In case studies, the researcher explores in depth a program, an event, an activity, a process, an individual, or relations between individuals (Creswell 2003). Case studies may use more than one method of data collection, for example, interviews and ethnographic observations (Keen 2006). Stake (2000) mentioned three types of case studies:
a) the intrinsic case study provides better understanding of a phenomenon which is usually single and cannot be generalised
b) the instrumental case study examines in-depth insight into an issue or revises a generalisation
c) the collective case study includes a number of cases to investigate general conditions

This study used the collective case study approach with extended families from different villages to investigate the experiences of armed civil conflict. The case studies were made from the selected Tamang and Bahun-Chhetri families that were identified through FGDs and in-depth interviews.

**Case 1: The Tamangs**
Tamang families were selected for the case study because of Tamang marginalisation and because they are one of the significant indigenous groups in the hills of Nepal. During the last decade, the extent of political violence was severe in the rural hills region because almost all rural areas were under the control of the Maoists, with the government controlling the cities and district headquarters (INSEC 2007; Huntington 2002). Case studies proceeded by interviews, informal conversation and observation. Selection of families was on the basis that at least one member of the household, because of various reasons, was directly affected by and/or involved in the political insurgency. It should be noted that some Tamangs, particularly those living on their traditional land, do not competently speak or understand the national language - Nepali. They primarily speak the Tamang language which points to a linguistic disadvantage in communication and political engagement.

**Case 2: The Bahun-Chhetris**
Extended family case studies were undertaken in Bahun-Chhetri communities along the same lines as the Tamang case studies. The selection of the households and informants followed the same process as in the Tamang case studies. Bahun-Chhetri families were selected for the case study because they are the dominant group in the three research districts and they are the most significant and numerous non-indigenous group in Nepal. Bahun-Chhetris are fluent speakers of Nepali.
3.4. Study Population and Sampling

3.4.1. Characteristics of the Study Population

The study population of the thesis is rural people with emphasis on the Tamangs and the Bahun-Chhetris. Although there are more than 100 ethnic groups in Nepal, the population can be broadly divided into the following four groups (CBS 2008, 2002; Riaz and Basu 2007; Bhattachan 2003; Whelpton 1997):

a) Bahun-Chhetris: The dominant high caste group who are the majority inhabitants of the hills region and control almost every state structure. The Bahuns are the main decision makers supported by the Chhetris, Thakuris and Sanyasis. However, there are many marginalised Bahun-Chhetris in rural areas, especially in mid-western Nepal.

b) Janajatis or indigenous peoples of Nepal: A minority suppressed group of many different ethnicities who live in particular geographical areas. For example, Tamangs are one of the Janajatis and they live in central Nepal surrounding the Kathmandu valley. The Janajatis do not fall under the Hindu caste system with the exception of some Newars. Highly populated ethnic groups under this category are Tamangs, Magars, Gurungs, Rais, Limbus and Tharus.

c) Dalits: A minority oppressed group scattered in almost all parts of the country. They are low caste Hindus. The most numerous are Kamis, Damais, Sarkis and Chamars.

d) Madheshis and others: Madheshis are a minority group who live in the southern plains of Nepal. Among them, Yadavs, Kayasthas, Madheshi-Brahmins and Rajputs are numerically dominant. They are also high caste Hindus but are considered inferior to the Bahun-Chhetris. There are also some minority groups living in the southern plains but they are not called Madheshis, for example, Muslims, Marwadis, Bangalis, and Sikhs. Small population and/or un-listed ethnic groups are Bankariyas, Dolpos, Larkes, Lhomis, Siyars, Surels, Tanwes and Thudams.

These four categories within the population are usually mentioned in most civil conflict reports rather than by specific ethnic identity. For example, the Informal Sector Service Centre (INSEC 2010a) reported 15,027 persons as victims of the conflict who were
disabled, disappeared or killed. Distribution of the victims and their corresponding population are presented group-wise in Table 3.1 and Figure 3.1. For example, INSEC (2010a) did not report the number of Tamang victims separately, hence, they are included within the category of Janajatis.

Table 3.1: Ethnicity, conflict victims and population of Nepal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Number of caste/ethnic groups</th>
<th>Enumerated population</th>
<th>Reported conflict victims</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bahun-Chhetris</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7,023,220 (30.89)</td>
<td>6,724 (44.75)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janajatis</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>8,460,701 (37.21)</td>
<td>5,375 (35.77)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dalits</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3,369,621 (14.82)</td>
<td>1,668 (11.10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madheshis and other</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>3,883,392 (17.08)</td>
<td>1,260 (8.38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>22,736,934 (100)</td>
<td>15,027 (100)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: a) Figures in the table in parentheses indicate percentages.

b) This table (hence, figure below) was developed from population data given in CBS (2008, 2002) and conflict victim’s data reported by INSEC (2010a).

Figure 3.1: Comparison between percentage of victims and percentage of population

The above table and figure confirm that people from all caste/ethnic groups were victimised by the civil conflict. They also demonstrate that, in general, the Bahun-Chhetris were more affected, followed by the Janajatis and the Dalits. The first three groups were the main participants in the 1996-2006 civil conflict, because the conflict
was intensive in the hills, while it was at low grade in the southern plains. The information summarised above raises the question of why and how Bahun-Chhetris were more affected whereas other groups were less affected. This thesis also considers this question.

Information on the distribution of population shows the existence of both Tamangs and Bahun-Chhetris in all districts of Nepal (CBS 2008). However, the Tamangs most densely populate (more than 70 per cent) the central part whereas the Bahun-Chhetris are scattered almost evenly in all districts. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, Nepal has been divided into three regions to assist in the selection of study sites (Figure 3.2).

a) Region 1, Traditional land: districts in central Nepal where the Tamangs settled first.
b) Region 2, Migrated-land Hill: hill/mountain districts in Nepal where the Tamangs later migrated.
c) Region 3, Migrated-land Terai: districts in southern Nepal where the Tamangs and the Bahun-Chhetris migrated during the 20th century.

Figure 3.2: Map of Nepal and study districts

Note: The author developed this figure by downloading an online map from http://ncthakur.itgo.com/map04.htm on 30 April 2008. The borders are only approximate and do not represent correct scale.
3.4.2. Study Sites and Sampling

This study undertook methodological consideration for site selection and sampling. Basically, there are two principal approaches to sampling for qualitative studies (Keen 2006): *purposive sampling* in which sites are selected on the basis of the phenomenon being investigated; and *theoretical sampling* designed specifically to test a hypothesis derived either from previous research or from data collected earlier in the same study. This study used purposive sampling to compare a privileged and a marginalised ethnic group in rural areas (Figure 3.3) in which there were high levels of civil conflict.

Figure 3.3: Geographical terrain on the hills

*Difficult steep terrain*: On the left-side road, the Maoists attacked public vehicles from both sides of the hilly terrain. Government soldiers had used the vehicles.

*A district headquarters*: The Maoists attacked this headquarters situated on the top of the hill, robbed/destroyed banks and abducted government officials.

Site selection for a study should take into account the locations in which the greatest concentrations of the sample population are to be found (Keen 2006). Therefore, for this study, locations with major incidents of the civil conflict where both Tamangs and Bahun-Chhetris lived were chosen for fieldwork. The site selection for this study satisfied both those criteria and was carried out at three levels. Firstly, the student researcher collected information regarding the appropriateness of the target districts (see criteria just above) from the relevant government ministries, and from the headquarters of basic social service providers in Kathmandu. Based on the available data and on recommendations from Ministerial officers and from other relevant organisations, three districts namely Kavre, Dhankuta and Morang were selected from the three regions depicted in Figure 3.2 above. All of the three districts chosen have difficult vertical
geographical terrain that favoured the insurgents in hiding from, and attacking, government security forces.

Secondly, the student researcher visited the selected district headquarters and followed the same process for selecting villages in the chosen rural areas. To verify the suitability of these choices, the student researcher called Nepalese colleagues with whom he was familiar. He visited potential villages in the selected districts (Figure 3.4).

Figure 3.4: Study districts and data collection sites

1. **Kavre** district occupies a 1,396 square kilometre area with mostly vertical terrain; has 5 per cent plains area; 93 per cent population dependant on farming; 86.3 per cent rural population; divided into three municipalities and 87 village development committees (VDCs) (CBS 2005a). Main data collection sites were 10 to 30 kilometres from the district centre.

2. **Dhankuta** district occupies 891 square kilometre area with 96.5 per cent vertical terrain; 64 per cent population dependant on farming; 87.6 per cent rural population; divided into one municipality and 87 VDCs (CBS 2005b). Main data collection sites were 5 to 10 kilometres from the district centre.

3. **Morang** district occupies 1,855 square kilometre area with 80 per cent flat area; 59.5 per cent population dependant on farming; 80.2 per cent rural population; divided into one sub-metropolitan city and 65 VDCs (CBS 2005c). Main data collection sites were 50 to 60 kilometres from the district centre.

Note: The author developed this figure by downloading online maps from [http://www.digitalhimalaya.com/collections/maps/nepalmaps/](http://www.digitalhimalaya.com/collections/maps/nepalmaps/) on 14 August 2012. The borders are only approximate and do not represent correct scale.
Figure 3.4 presents basic information about the study districts and data collection sites. According to the census 2001, on average two-thirds of the population were literate in these districts. However, the literacy rate for females was much lower than for males. Female literacy rate was approximately 50 per cent only. All three districts were inhabited by the major ethnic groups (Table 3.2).

Table 3.2: Ethnic population groupings in the research districts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Kavre</th>
<th>Dhankuta</th>
<th>Morang</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bahun-Chhetris</td>
<td>147,467 (38.2)</td>
<td>46,776 (28.1)</td>
<td>212,607 (25.2)</td>
<td>406,850 (29.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamangs</td>
<td>130,261 (33.8)</td>
<td>9,939 (6.0)</td>
<td>18,953 (2.3)</td>
<td>159,153 (11.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Janajatis</td>
<td>83,116 (21.6)</td>
<td>95,750 (57.5)</td>
<td>344,091 (40.8)</td>
<td>522,957 (37.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dalits</td>
<td>22,817 (5.9)</td>
<td>11,169 (6.7)</td>
<td>115,094 (13.6)</td>
<td>149,080 (10.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madheshis and other</td>
<td>2,011 (0.5)</td>
<td>2,845 (1.7)</td>
<td>152,475 (18.1)</td>
<td>157,331 (11.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>385,672 (100)</td>
<td>166,479 (100)</td>
<td>843,220 (100)</td>
<td>1,395,371 (100)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: a) Figures in the table in parentheses indicate percentages.

b) This table was developed from population data given in CBS (2008, 2002).

In summary, Bahun-Chhetris were numerically dominant in Kavre district, but there were almost as many Tamangs. Other Janajatis were numerically dominant in Dhankuta, although nearly a third of the population were Bahun-Chhetris. Tamangs here were only 6 per cent of the population. Other Janajatis also dominated numerically in Morang, but Bahun-Chhetris made up a quarter of the population. Tamangs were only 2.3 per cent of the population. The villages selected in all three districts saw intense fighting during the civil conflict.

Thirdly, it was necessary to investigate local context and travel options to adjust to any failure of public transportation due to the unfavourable security situations. Transportation strikes, rallies and demonstrations, and activities of different agitating groups were continuing. For example, while evaluating potential research sites a sudden strike was called in the destination region and no public vehicles were moving (Figure 3.5).
Figure 3.5: A day of the Bandha, 21 February 2009

At mid-day in a sub-metropolitan city: Many people were travelling on foot or by cycles. A *rikshaw* [three-wheeled man-pulled cycle] was carrying six passengers.

A bus not on a scheduled journey: A public bus depicted a false marriage procession and carried passengers. The red banner read *Shuva Vibaaha* [Auspicious Marriage].

The student researcher was transported on a friend’s motorcycle to the target site through rough roads, avoiding encounters with protestors. During the stage of identifying and selecting research sites, the student researcher used local knowledge to find information and identify residents who could assist (Figure 3.6). Here, a new strategy was identified to collect data successfully, that is, the importance of recruiting local volunteers to find appropriate research participants.

Figure 3.6: Data collection villages

Adjoining Tamang village: Usually, Tamang settlements are dense and farm-land per household is less. Most Tamangs own only dry farm-lands.

Adjoining Bahun-Chhetri village: Usually, Bahun-Chhetri settlements are loose and farm-land per household is greater.
The project has taken individuals and families as units of analysis. de Vaus (1995) maintains that there will be a direct trade off between the number of sites selected and the number of units of analysis chosen. Therefore, since this is doctoral research, and considering the time constraints, the minimum sample size in the proposed project was decided to be six FGDs targeting villages, 12 in-depth interviews with each male and female informant, and 12 case studies of families. The student researcher successfully fulfilled the minimum requirement for the sample size.

The process of selecting and entering research sites was continuously negotiated. In general, it seems that while entering research sites is not a difficult endeavour for a local researcher, it can still be quite challenging, as indicated above. The challenges of entering research sites become more difficult when a researcher is alone and the security situation is not favourable. However, future researchers need not be discouraged. After continued efforts, the challenges can become opportunities and researcher is able to gain advantages through negotiation and use of emerging opportunities. In the end, meetings were held with village-level social service providers and community leaders. Ensuring the appropriateness of the site for fieldwork, processes for participant selection and data collection were all initiated.

3.5. Participant Selection and Data Collection Process

Once permission had been obtained to conduct research in a village, an information statement and informant consent form was provided to potential participants. However, participants’ written consent could not be obtained because they could not read. Volunteers suggested the research be explained verbally because of the participants’ lack of ability to read and understand the information. They also warned about signatures. People were suspicious about how their signature might be used. The main problem with taking signatures was that they could be used for making ‘false charges’. This was a genuine suspicion because during the civil conflict many villagers had suffered due to the false charges (see Corcoran 1999). Considering the sensitivity of the situation, verbal consent was obtained.
Individuals aged 18 years and over on the day of data collection participated in this study. Participants fell into three groups: the Tamangs; the Bahun-Chhetris; and community leaders and social service providers who play key roles in social-cultural, political and other dynamics of the respective communities (Figure 3.7). Some of those in the latter group were Tamangs, or other Janajatis, but the majority were Bahun-Chhetris. As pointed out earlier, Bahun-Chhetris are better educated, generally wealthier, and control most of the rural district administrative positions.

A total of 125 people including 42 females participated in the study. Table 3.3 shows that 61 people from Region 1, 35 from Region 2 and 29 from Region 3 were included in the data collection process. Among them, 56 were Tamangs, 59 Bahun-Chhetris and 10 from other caste/ethnic groups. A total of 72 in-depth interviews including 21 with women, six extended family case studies for each Tamangs and Bahun-Chhetris, and seven FGDs were carried out. The in-depth interviews were continued until saturation of information was realised.
Table 3.3: Number and description of research participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>In-depth interview</th>
<th>Extended family case study</th>
<th>Focus group Discussion (FGD)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Region 1, Traditional land</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamangs</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bahun-Chhetris</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subtotal</strong></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Region 2, Migrated-land Hill</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamangs</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bahun-Chhetris</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subtotal</strong></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Region 3, Migrated-land Terai</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamangs</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bahun-Chhetris</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subtotal</strong></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>All</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamangs</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bahun-Chhetris</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>21</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: M = Male, F = Female and B = Total of male and female.
About one-third of Tamang participants said they became literate without attending formal schools. Some of them had attended non-formal education launched by government and non-government organisations while many of them became literate by participating in the Maoist education activities. Among the participants, 7.7 per cent of Tamangs were illiterate while it was 12.8 per cent for Bahun-Chhetris. None of the Bahun-Chhetri male participants were illiterate.

Nearly one-fifth of the participants from both Tamangs and Bahun-Chhetris reported that they were living in circumstances of low socio-economic status. The rest of the Tamang and Bahun-Chhetri participants presented themselves as belonging to a middle or high socio-economic class in their villages. However, analysis of their occupations revealed that the Bahun-Chhetris dominated in better income sectors, for example, teachers, government staff, non-government staff and working abroad. 18 per cent of the Tamangs who reported as traders owned retail shops or tea shops in their villages but they were often unable to make enough income to fulfil their family needs. Similarly, 30.8 per cent of Tamang participants and 5.1 per cent of Bahun-Chhetri participants had worked for the Maoists. Research participants’ engagement in different sectors indicates that the Bahun-Chhetris have a hold on good income sectors while the Tamangs had engaged in no or less income sectors, for example, working for the Maoists. Table 3.4 shows further details of research participants based on an analysis of self-reported personal information.

The interviews and FGDs included broadly four thematic areas (Appendices I and II), namely:

a) people’s involvement in and experience of the armed civil conflict
b) access to basic social services and opportunity to express opinions
c) socio-economic status, survival strategies and gender roles
d) social change and overall impact of the conflict

Although both the FGDs and in-depth interviews were guided by these four thematic areas, the former covered the experience and effect of conflict at the village or community level, and the latter inquired about the same issues in-depth in relation to the family and family members’ experience and involvement.
Table 3.4: Self-reported characteristics of research participants (in percentages)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Tamangs</th>
<th>Bahun-Chhetris</th>
<th>Others</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education achieved</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literate without formal education</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>24.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literate with formal education</td>
<td>61.5</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>57.1</td>
<td>63.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illiterate</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Occupation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>41.0</td>
<td>48.7</td>
<td>42.8</td>
<td>44.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trader</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politician</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>17.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government staff</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-government staff</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working abroad</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Socio-economic status</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>71.4</td>
<td>22.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>71.8</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>65.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Political orientation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communist</td>
<td>56.4</td>
<td>53.9</td>
<td>85.7</td>
<td>57.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>15.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unspecific</td>
<td>28.2</td>
<td>28.2</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>27.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Worked as a member of the Maoists</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>17.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>69.2</td>
<td>94.9</td>
<td>85.7</td>
<td>82.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Number of Tamangs = 56, Bahun-Chhetris = 59, Other = 10 and Total = 125.
FGDs were held in a place that was suitable for attending participants, for example, four FGDs were held at participants’ homes and three were held at the market (Figure 3.8). To accommodate participants’ schedules, two groups were organised at night. Six to 10 individuals were invited to participate in a FGD (Morgan 1997). In the end, four to seven persons participated in each FGD.

Figure 3.8: Focus group discussions (FGDs) in progress

FGD participants were encouraged to discuss and comment on each other’s statements to explore and clarify their views in ways that might have been less accessible in a one-to-one interview (Kitzinger 2006). Sometimes, a debate was raised between the participants because of conflicting experiences. A polite request to respect each other was an immediate solution. The student researcher said to the debating participants that he was interested in talking with them in person. He undertook in-depth interviews with those who had had specific experiences.
Most in-depth interviews were held in participants’ homes (Figure 3.9). A few interviews were conducted in markets and one in a relative’s home as the participant had gone there because of personal reasons. One participant was interviewed at the student researcher’s home in the capital due to his refusal to give an interview in a public place in the market. He did not want to disclose his experience in front of his
family who lived with him in a rented room. He came from a rural village and his interview was very important for the study because he had survived a death-trap in the war.

All in-depth interviews went well and without much difficulty. Some participants told their stories with confidence and pride. A few participants asked if they might face any danger because of sharing their experiences. They were assured that their privacy would be maintained. After this assurance, interviews continued naturally. All in-depth interviews were like a conversation, flexible for gaining a depth of understanding and ‘powerful’ for digging out information from the participants (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2006; Babbie 2004).

While FGDs led to the in-depth interviews, the in-depth interviews likewise formed a basis for extended family case studies. When a participant’s story was related to other family members, a means was sought to talk to those members. Sometimes, the process of collecting information from the family members progressed like a FGD.

Data was recorded in three ways: notes written at the time, notes written afterwards, and audio recording (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree 2006). Everyone agreed to the recording of conversations. In the beginning, some participants felt uneasy. However, when interviews proceeded naturally, nobody thought anymore about the recording. Naturalistic and spontaneous interviews continued in an unproblematic way despite the use of the recorder (see Lee 2004). Only a few participants showed any interest in playing back their recordings. When they were played, none of them wanted to listen to the full recording. Instead, they said they had told their stories and they could be used.

Besides using a digital recorder, notes were made afterwards, recalling what had been observed and heard. Notes were also taken while important information was revealed during informal conversations or in an observation. Photographs relevant to the study were taken.
3.6. Data Processing, Analysis and Interpretations

FGDs and interviews were transcribed and translated. All transcriptions were reviewed and checked with field note observations. An academic who has worked in Nepal for many years and understands the Nepali language well ensured that transcriptions from the local language were translated into English while retaining the correct meanings.

The translated transcripts were put into an appropriate software program (N-Vivo). The data was thematically coded, analysed and presented in narratives, tables, diagrams and dialogues. Data describing the informant profiles was entered into SPSS and analysed descriptively. The data are interpreted and discussed under various thematic topics in Chapters 4 to 9. It was required to listen to the audio records repeatedly while reading the transcriptions to ensure accuracy during interpretation.

3.7. Positioning the Researcher

The student researcher comes from the marginalised ethnic group - the Tamangs - selected for the study. While this has many advantages in terms of data collection, and is in keeping with the ideals of subaltern studies, I have maintained every effort to avoid bias. For example, none of the Tamang participants were my close relatives. My own village was not included for data collection. In fact, none of the informants have ever been to my village. Furthermore, I have had no direct relationship with the privileged ethnic group (the Bahun-Chhetris) who participated in this study. In addition, I selected villages with which I was not much familiar, that is, I excluded my neighbouring villages and the villages where my close relatives resided. By doing this, I maintained an outsider position, an acquired identity because of the nature of the study being launched.

During data collection, my main challenge was to maintain neutrality. Being neutral was important for two reasons (Ergun and Erdemir 2010). First, I had to grasp participants’ internal perspectives about the civil conflict and understand the actual meaning of their expression. Second, I had to preserve distance and confidentiality so that I could access experiences of conflicting factions. From both perspectives, I maintained neutrality. I
did not encounter serious problems in recognising myself as a neutral researcher. It was possible because of my long exposure to different ethnic groups. Before this study, I worked in the health and social development sector in Nepal for over 15 years.

However, I had to negotiate my position both as insider and outsider while the interviews progressed in different dimensions (Ergun and Erdemir 2010). For example, when participants described their painful experiences, I positioned myself as an insider affirming that Nepalese suffered from various pains in their current situation. By saying this I motivated participants to continue their stories. On the other hand, when participants wanted to know my political affiliation, I told them that I believed in equality and equity. They asked me which political party I belonged to. I replied that I did not belong to any political party and did not campaign for any of them during the elections. In saying this, I did not reveal my political position to the participants although Ergun and Erdemir (2010, p 29) see it as a necessity to reveal a researcher’s political position. Instead, I espoused a professional position that was politically neutral. I told them that I had worked as a development worker and travelled around rural villages during the conflict period without any serious difficulty. This explanation positioned me as an outsider and facilitated the participants to express their perceptions. In some instances, I also took assistance from volunteers who played crucial roles in establishing my trustworthiness among participants.

Taking assistance from volunteers was also a challenge to maintain privacy. Therefore, I asked the volunteers to leave us for a while after the introduction. Interestingly, none of the participants wanted the volunteers to depart from the interviewing scene. It was up to the volunteer and I to decide whether the presence of the volunteer would hinder the conversation or not. The volunteers were present in less than half of the interviews. Wherever they were present, they facilitated interactions without generating any problem. The volunteers were not my close friends or relatives. They were 10 local people including three Tamangs and three females. They came from nine different villages and offered their service freely. I can assure the reader that the findings presented in this thesis are realistic and devoid of any personal or communal bias.
This chapter has reviewed the research methodology and outlined the research design of this thesis. Three districts were selected as study sites and the reasons for that selection were explained. The research aimed to explore rural people’s lived experiences, particularly the experiences of Tamangs and Bahun-Chhetris, and this guided all aspects of the site selection and methodological design. Despite the difficult security situation, fieldwork was successfully carried out by having negotiations at different levels. Use of available networks of organisations and colleagues was the foundation of success. As many other researchers have found, making personal contacts enabled the student researcher to access research sites and study the target populations without much difficulty.

The next chapter is the first results chapter of this thesis. It deals with fundamental causes of the civil conflict drawn from people’s lived experiences.
Chapter 4. Fundamental Causes of the Civil Conflict

4.1. Introduction

This chapter analyses rural people’s experiences during the period of the Maoist-led ‘people’s war’ and explores the underlying causes of the civil conflict and violence. The chapter considers the ways in which the research participants conceived the causes of the conflict or represented in their discussion some aspect of the basic foundations of the conflict. The discussions with the research participants were focused on perceptions and understandings, and the meaning of their experiences for them, rather than testing predefined causes from previous research experience or from the literature of other scholars’ work.

Although scholars have contributed greatly to our knowledge of revolutions, better understanding of civil conflict is still limited in scholarly enquiry. Most studies have focused only on selective elements of the civil conflict and do not take into account the complicated relationship between economic, political, social and cultural factors that influence conflict and violence (Aylward 2007). Aylward (2007) argues that complex analyses are more useful because they provide a more complete understanding of conflict. This chapter is an attempt to gain a better understanding of the conditions that gave rise to the civil conflict in Nepal.

The following sections deal with the complexity of the causes of the civil conflict, bringing forward rural people’s voices to inform and enrich the discussion. Based on the reflections of rural people it is argued that the underlying causes of the civil conflict are multiple, complex, and deep-rooted. To assist our understanding of the causes, they are discussed in three sections; namely governance, socio-economic status and gender. These sections illustrate how and why different groups of rural people participated in the civil conflict in Nepal, and elaborate the causes that show interdependence and interconnectivity to each other.
4.2. Poor Governance and Injustice: the Root Cause of the Conflict

Poor governance is identified and explained as a significant cause for people’s willing involvement with the Maoists both before and during the people’s war. For that reason, the time frame of discussion here is the last half of the 20th century, with emphasis on the period after 1990.

For the first time, Nepal witnessed the introduction of a democratic system at the beginning of 1951, with the end of 104 years of Rana autocracy. At that time India aided the formation of a tripartite power-sharing coalition government comprised of the Rana, the Congress and the King (Hachhethu et al 2008; Ganguly and Shoup 2005). After the establishment of the democracy, the first parliamentary election was held in 1959. Nepalese people expected to gain benefits from the democratically-elected government. Unfortunately, the King overthrew the government in 1960 and introduced the 30 year autocratic Panchayat system (Hachhethu et al 2008; Gellner 2007; Subedi 1998). Despite rhetoric of democracy, equality and development, the Panchayat system strengthened inequality, especially between urban and rural areas (Gellner 2007). Nepalese people kept on demanding a multi-party democratic system and equality, justice and development. Eventually, the Jana Andolan I [People’s Movement I] led by the Nepali Congress Party in conjunction with the United Left Front re-established multi-party democracy in 1990 (Ganguly and Shoup 2005).

Yet, despite the re-establishment of the multi-party system, most Nepalese people did not get adequate access to development opportunities because of government instability. Weak governments changed frequently: 12 governments were formed one after another over a period of 10 years (Acharya 2009). Major political parties ignored new proposals for change and development brought forward by minor political parties. For example, in 1996, the Maoist Party put forward 40 demands but the government did not address them properly (Karki and Seddon 2003). The 40 demands included issues related to nationalism, public wellbeing and people’s livelihoods, including stopping armed police operations, and eliminating false charges and corruption. Eventually, on 13 February 1996, the Maoists announced war against the government by issuing a leaflet that called on the people of Nepal to establish a New Democratic State (Karki and Seddon 2003).
4.2.1. Attempts to Suppress People’s Demands

Rather than finding a peaceful resolution to the challenge, the government in 1996 used state force to suppress the Maoists and other opponents. The following excerpt taken from an interview shows how the government tried to eliminate their opponents in rural villages.

The conflict took place because of the failure of political and ideological decision making. Some people took part in politics for a post and some people took part for a class … The Kilo Sierra II operation [the state operation to suppress the Maoists and their supporters] killed many people, and individual enemies. If somebody said a person was not good, then he was killed. The administration was under the instruction of Person K1, a supporter of the government in the village. Person K1 was a Tamang supporter of the Nepali Congress. At that time, Tamang people were tortured and killed under the instruction of the Congress (T01, Int, male, 48 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 15 March 2009).

T01 maintained that the Bahun-Chhetri-led government mobilised Tamangs to kill other Tamangs. Hence, he supported the Maoists in the war against the government and later became a member of the Maoists. This case is an example of how the war began and why many people, particularly Tamangs, supported the Maoists in the war.

The government soldiers were frightened of the Maoists. They used people as shields for their own safety and, wherever possible, they did not travel separately. They travelled with the general public in public vehicles, increasing the risk of casualties to the public.

A Bahun-Chhetri Person B1 from a neighbouring village was shot dead by the royal army. The army were coming on a public bus and the boy with others was also travelling in the same bus. The army were going to Bhojpur district. At that time, the soldiers preferred public transportation rather than their own vehicles. Perhaps the boy showed some suspicious behaviour and the army shot him. Many people were
killed without reason (B33, Int, male, 60 years, Bahun-Chhetri, Dhankuta district, 16 April 2009).

From this account, we can see how the government soldiers could kill any innocent people, just because of their suspicions. The soldiers had authority to kill people in the name of suppressing the rebellion. By the end of 2008, 16,210 people had been killed and the government accounted for 52 per cent of those killings (INSEC 2009).

The following excerpt represents another type of risk and insecurity to the general public posed by government forces trying to suppress the Maoist rebellion.

They beat my youngest son without any reason. I had sent him to supply water in my rice field. He had gone from school with his school bag. The soldiers checked his body and found bruises in his shoulder. Then they beat him seriously thinking that he worked for the Maoists. How could they say that? The school children carry books in their bags and their shoulders have bruises because of that. The soldiers were not human. They were ghosts. They beat my child and threatened to kill him. They said they would kill him and offered him a last wish. When my son came home he said he thought of me, his mother. He said that at the moment before they would kill him, he wished I could have been there and I would have fought against them. I would shoot them with a gun. I would have been killed by fighting with those bastard soldiers. My son was only in grade five but they treated him as if he was grown up. But he was just 11 years old … If I had a gun at that time, I would have shot them (B20, Int, female, 40 years, Bahun-Chhetri, Morang district, 09 April 2009).

The above account is an example of the mistreatment and torture that the government delivered to its people during the civil conflict. The government soldiers even tortured children suspecting that they worked for the Maoists. The children’s parents could not do anything against the perpetrators because the situation was not favourable for them. Instead, they either joined the Maoists or supported them in the war against the government. The following excerpt tells of a woman and her husband who worked for the Maoists.
My husband did not come when I delivered our child. I had met him a few months before. He never came again. I spent two years at my paternal home. One man told me that my husband was arrested in Place P2. He heard the royal soldiers saying that they should not have killed my husband (T24, Int, female, 35 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 20 March 2009).

The account implies that the woman’s husband disappeared when he was working for the Maoists. Between 1996 and 2006, it is estimated that 783 persons disappeared because of government forces whereas only 105 persons are estimated to have disappeared because of the Maoists (INSEC 2007). These figures imply that the government was more responsible than the Maoists for the killing, torture and disappearance of people during the conflict. Informants claimed that the government was more inclined to suppress people by abusing state power and that they did not bring the wrong-doers to justice.

The cases presented above are examples of how the state misused its power to oppress the general public while trying to suppress the uprising. These kinds of oppressive acts against the civilian population had also been common during the earlier Panchayat system when the government of the day was suppressing opposition in 1961, 1971 and 1974 (Gersony 2003, p 29). Gersony (2003) argues that during the Panchayat period government action was fast and effective in controlling uprisings by mobilising the royal army and negotiating with the rebels. However, after 1990 the government failed to control the growing insurgency because it was late in mobilising the royal army to combat the Maoist forces.

4.2.2. Fault on Both Sides

Between 1990 and 2006, threats, attacks and assaults were common in Maoist strongholds. The government army suspected everyone and the Maoists were keen to locate local traitors. Some ordinary people died in battles and cross-fire. The data collected for this study show that there were numerous government actions that compelled people to support the Maoists in the conflict. For example, one civilian was returning from work and was trapped in a battle. The government army used the bus in
which he was travelling and the Maoists attacked the bus despite the fact that civilians were also inside the bus. The informant said,

On the way, the royal army stopped the bus, threatened the bus driver and about 50 army personnel rode on the bus with us. They also stopped a tipper truck and about 25 army personnel rode on the tipper. As we were going along, the Maoists suddenly fired on the bus. The bus was carrying 25 army personnel on the top and 25 inside with 16 ordinary passengers. The firing killed two passengers immediately. A child was also killed … Six royal army personnel were killed inside the bus … In fact 42 persons were killed (T05, FGD, male, 20 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 16 March 2009).

This account from a young man, who was trapped in a battle in 2005, shows that the lives of civilians were in danger when they travelled from one place to another. Unarmed civilians were injured and killed in battles even when they did not have any direct relationship with the battling parties.

In the worst cases, instead of protecting its citizens, the government tortured and killed innocent people including children. The government did not take any responsibility for that kind of torture and killing, and did not provide any support to the victims. The following account verifies civilian insecurity and the irresponsible actions of the government at that time.

A farmer of Place A1 village was looking after his crops. At night he was guarding his crops against wild rabbits. He hit an old tin for a while so that the rabbits might run away because of the tin’s noise. Unfortunately, the government soldiers who were on a search program heard the noise and fired towards the direction of noise … An innocent farmer was killed. If someone was killed by the Maoists, the government used to provide some financial support. But he was killed by the government security patrol. The government did not take responsibility for the killing and did not provide any support (B33, Int, male, 60 years, Bahun-Chhetri, Dhankuta district, 16 April 2009).
Summarising the accounts offered above, the irresponsible actions of the government, especially disappearance, torture and killing, compelled many rural people to participate in the civil conflict whether they supported the Maoist Party or not. During the civil conflict they did not see any alternative other than actively joining the Maoists or just supporting them in their struggle. The mass support of people for the anti-government struggle, whether purely voluntary or not, intensified the conflict and the government lost control over the situation.

Official data shows that the government had mobilised state security forces and killed 1,160 persons during the first six years of the insurgency (INSEC 2009). From 1996 to 2001, the number of killings by the state security forces was approximately 57 per cent of the total deaths, clearly surpassing the number of killings by the Maoists in the same period of six years. Only in the sixth year of the insurgency, from August to November 2001, did the government hold peace talks with the Maoists (MOPR 2010). Unfortunately, three rounds of peace talks failed. The government declared a nationwide emergency on 26 November 2001 and deployed the royal army to combat the Maoists (Upreti 2006). The deployment of the royal army increased the conflict in severity so much that one third of the total killed during the 10 year civil war occurred in the first year of the royal army deployment (INSEC 2009). Because of the increased brutality and killings, opposition to the declared state of emergency also increased, both inside the political party that led the government and in other political parties, and civil organisations. Subsequently, the elected government recommended the king dissolve parliament in May 2002 and renew a declared state of emergency (BBC 2010). The government promised to carry out fresh elections but failed to initiate election preparation over the next four months. Eventually, in October 2002 the king suspended the parliament, dismissed the elected government and formed a government of his own choice (Upreti 2006). From that point, the king took over power, ending the democratic system that had been established by the people’s movement in 1990. This take-over by the monarchy further intensified the conflict and brought it to a new level.

From the description above we can see how the civil conflict started and what happened subsequently. It is evident that a major cause of the conflict and its escalation was the poor system of government enacted by weak regimes that imposed brutality on the Nepalese people instead of providing development opportunities and freedom of choice.
Each weak government threatened people who were not its supporters. They could ensure support forcefully. One informant confirmed this situation. He said, ‘since I was a Communist candidate in the 1994 election, I was targeted to be killed. I became a member of the Congress Party in 1996 just so that I could live’ (T12, FGD, male, 45 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 17 March 2009). Further discussion with this informant revealed that he met Maoist leaders who asked him to work for them in 1997. In 1998, he became vice-chair of the village committee for the Tamang Mukti Morchaa [one of the ethnic wings of the Maoists] and led Maoist activities in his own and neighbouring villages. The account of this informant implies that he joined various political sides because of coercion. Eventually, he became an active Maoist.

It can be argued that the continued practice of poor governance is a legacy from 1768 when Prithvi Narayan Shah made modern Nepal and imposed the policy of domination by one caste, one language, one religion and one culture over many ethnic, linguistic, religious and cultural groups (Bhattachan 2002). The legacy is that each ethnic community is concerned with the perceived threat to their language, culture and traditions. One of the Tamang informants said, ‘issues of Tamang language, culture and traditions are being raised. We have to preserve and develop our language, culture and traditions. Policies should be formed. Books should be written’ (T28, FGD, male, 45 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 07 April 2009). Bhattachan (2002) argues that in Nepal the ‘predatory state’ suppressed indigenous and traditional voluntary systems of local governance. In the centralised unitary state system, only the centre was then able to exercise legislative, executive and judicial power (ADDCN 2007).

Even after the people’s movement victory in 1990, Nepal’s constitution did not include any constitutional guarantee of ‘local self-governance’. The 1990 constitution failed to define the minimum organisational basis clearly and failed to ensure people’s participation in the system (CCD 2009). Bowing to lobbying in 1999, the local self-governance act (LSGA) was enacted which created the legal basis for decentralisation of planning and program implementation to locally elected authorities (UNDAF 2002). The local self-governance act sought to institutionalise the process of development through representation of ethnic communities, indigenous groups and downtrodden people in the local bodies so that they would be able to make decisions. However, in practice the act was limited to the delegation of authority. Responsibilities and
accountabilities remained with the central government (ADDCN 2007). In 2002 when the locally elected bodies’ term expired, no further elections were held and local representative bodies became defunct (CCD 2009). This situation further diminished the representation of ordinary people in local governance. The environment became more conducive for the Maoists to intensify its ‘people’s war’.

4.2.3. Government Attempts to Win People’s Support

Although the war between the government and the Maoists was going on at the time, the government tried to gain people’s trust by introducing a social security program in 2004 (HMG 2004). Under the social security program, the government provided allowances for senior citizens aged 75 and over at 150 rupees per month; for widows aged 60 and over at 100 rupees per month; and for disabled individuals aged 16 and over at 100 rupees per month. However, not all eligible people received the allowance. The decision about who got the allowance was made by district development committees using recommendations from village development committees and municipalities.

We can judge the poor governance of this social security program by some available figures. The maximum number of disabled people permitted to receive allowances per district was 50: this means the total number of beneficiaries in 75 districts would equal 3,750 which is much lower than the actual number of disabled people. The total number of disabled in Nepal in 2001 was 103,795 and none of the districts reported less than 69 disabled individuals (CBS 2002). The number of blind people alone was 16,526. Hence, the government social security allowance program did not even reach all the blind people.

Demographic recording errors also rendered the program ineffective. For example, regarding the senior citizen allowance, one of the informants said, ‘I am already 75 years old but my citizenship certificate shows only 65 years old. Because of the wrong age on my citizenship certificate, I am not getting the elderly allowance’ (T23, Int, male, 75 years, Tamang, Dhankuta district, 11 April 2009). This informant had no one to advocate on his behalf and correct the date of birth so that he could get the allowance. There was no such mechanism for the general public at the local level. This is an
example of the implicitly exclusionary policy of the poor system of governance with inadequate social security provisions.

In a good system of governance, even the poorest and most vulnerable groups of people should be able to have a say in political decision-making. Moreover, good governance should ensure political, social and economic priorities, and promote the rule of law and the transparency of institutions, officials, and transactions (UNDP 1998). However, instead of promoting good governance along these lines, the short-lived governments of Nepal after 1990 promoted injustice as well as the exclusion of, and discrimination against, other groups who were not leading the government in formal and informal institutions (Lawati 2008), especially those who supported rival parties. One informant explained his experience of discriminatory practices. He said,

The Chief District Officer (CDO) discriminated against me in one case. I had taken forward a citizenship case before the conflict began. The CDO returned my file without approval. With a similar case, a worker for the ruling Congress Party entered the CDO’s room [the CDO was a Congress Party supporter] and presented his case. The CDO approved his file (B10, FGD, male, 47 years, Bahun-Chhetri, Kavre district, 21 March 2009).

Yet, despite such exclusionary practices in the actual system of governance, Lawati (2008) argues that the democracy of the time allowed Nepalese people to speak, organise and mobilise for their rights and justice, resulting in an ‘explosion’ of identity claims and women’s movement initiatives. These movements increased public awareness of inequality and discrimination, thus attracting more people to join the same movements, and in the end supported the Maoist challenge to the existing government.

4.3. Low Socio-economic Status: Fuelling the Conflict

In 1996, the Nepalese Maoists started the people’s war in socio-economically deprived areas. The ‘core’ Maoist area was in four districts: Rukum, Rolpa, Salyan and Jajarkot. The area lies in the mid-western region of Nepal (Karki and Seddon 2003). Reports show that the mid-western region and the ‘core’ Maoist areas had higher levels of socio-economic deprivation. That is, achievement on socio-economic indicators was below
the national average (HDR 1998; Das and Hatlebakk 2009). Moreover, more than 80 per cent of the regional population here depended on subsistence agriculture (CBS 2002, 1992).

The start of the war was swift and effective. For example, during the first month of the war, according to Karki and Seddon (2003, p 22), the Maoists captured the local Agriculture Development Bank, seized land ownership documents kept as collateral by the bank, distributed them to their owners and destroyed the official loan documents kept by the bank. This action is an example of one of the 6,000 ‘people’s actions’ that the Maoists carried out during the first month of the war. Interpreting these actions, Karki and Seddon (2003) argue that the main purpose of these actions was primarily ‘publicity’ so that many farmers would join and/or support the civil conflict. The argument of Karki and Seddon is supported in the thesis data. One of the informants said, ‘in 1996 … The Maoist Party had just entered into our village … They gave us what a woman would be interested in. They gave either make up items or combs. I got “fair and lovely” cream … They talked very nicely. Perhaps they were playing tricks to attract us’ (B08, Int, female, 30 years, Bahun-Chhetri, Kavre district, 14 March 2009). Another informant said, ‘some people participated in the protests for wages. They were offered Rs 50 or Rs 200 … Some boys from Place K1 were deceived and they joined the Maoists. Later, they returned and those innocent boys are living at home. Some were deceived for paid jobs’ (B02, Int, male, 70 years, Bahun-Chhetri, Kavre district, 13 March 2009). These stories indicate that the Maoist actions were aimed at gaining rural farmers’ support by appealing to their sense of injustice over their low socio-economic conditions. The Maoist strategies succeeded and the civil conflict that started in rural villages of mid-western Nepal gradually spread all over the country. The low socio-economic conditions that existed in rural villages served as a fuel for the conflict and helped the Maoists achieve their purpose in gaining support for a post-revolution fairer distribution of wealth and assets in the nation.

4.3.1. Rural Poverty and Subsistence Agriculture

The data collected for this study supports the argument that low socio-economic status, and rural poverty in the context of subsistence agriculture, validated the actions of Maoist rebels and lead eventually to the spread of the civil conflict all over the country.
Below are two excerpts, one each from Bahun-Chhetri and Tamang interviewees, which clearly demonstrate that poor rural farmers supported the people’s war because they were attracted to the Maoist aims.

We Nepalese are poor. In general, I found the policies, rules and constitution of the communists suitable for Nepal … Many people have 2 to 4 ropanis [0.104 to 0.208 hectares] of land. Some have thousands of ropanis. Maoists say they will implement revolutionary land reform … Farming is adequate for me: both from the perspectives of ropanis of land and income from them. Some people had many ropanis but they do not get enough to feed their family (B01, Int, male, 42 years, Bahun-Chhetri, Kavre district, 13 March 2009).

This excerpt shows that the informant supported the Maoists because he was attracted by the promise of land reform. He thought there should be a much more even-handed and fair distribution of land so that all farmers could feed their families and rich families did not dominate land ownership. He believed it was in his interests and in the interests of his farming community to endorse the Maoist platform. Another informant from Tamang community did not only support the Maoists but became an active Maoist,

I have only dry lands around 30 ropanis [1.56 hectares]. If rain comes in time, the land produces food that feeds my family for 7 to 8 months … I participated in the war to ensure food, clothes and shelter for everyone … First I joined the Maoists, then my family. Later, my relatives including my wife’s paternal family also joined the Maoists (T17, FGD, male, 55 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 19 March 2009).

This informant participated in the war because of the Maoist assurance for food, clothes and shelter. He also convinced his family members and relatives to support the Maoist cause.

In this case there seems to be little difference between the Bahun-Chhetri and the Tamang experiences and perceptions since both research participants were from a relatively low socio-economic background. However, it is noted that the Bahun-Chhetri informant did not join the Maoists, while the poorer Tamang informant did join up, followed by his family. Overall though, it can be said that throughout the years of
struggle, poor farmers of all kinds were drawn to the Maoist cause because of their impoverished rural circumstances.

Many rural people thought that if the Maoists took over the government, everyone would be equal because the properties of the rich would be divided and allocated to the poor. During the conflict, the Maoists captured many rich people’s land and properties. The rich people were either forced to join the conflict, forced to give huge donations or just abandoned their properties, which were confiscated by the Maoists. The Maoists implemented communal types of farming carried out by local farmers in confiscated properties. The General Secretary of the Maoist Party in an interview said, ‘when we seize the land from a landlord that will become collectively owned … all the peasants will work on that land and the earnings from that land will be the property of the locality’ (Onesto 2003). Generally, two-thirds of the products from the land went to the local farmers and one-third was taken by the Maoist Party. This was confirmed during an interview with one of the informants who said, ‘we used to harvest other people’s farms. The Maoists took away one third of production from the fields between 2002 and 2005’ (B17, Int, female, 33 years, Bahun-Chhetri, Dhankuta district, 08 April 2009). This radical action on land ownership and distribution of agricultural products convinced farmers that the Maoists would implement revolutionary land reform and redistribute the land to poor farmers once the war was won. Furthermore, the Maoist actions on land reform were far more effective in comparison to the various rounds of land reform adopted by successive governments after the introduction of democracy in 1950, which had almost always failed (Joshi and Mason 2007).

The history of government inaction on land reform led to mistrust in rural areas of Nepal. After the introduction of democracy, the Nepali Congress Party (NC) formally adopted the slogan ‘*jamin jotneko, ghar potneko*’ [land belongs to those who till it and a house belongs to those who clean it]. The NC won the 1959 election because the peasants who wanted meaningful land reform voted for the NC. Before the policy could be put into practice though, the King dismissed the people’s elected government in 1960 (Upreti 2006) and introduced the autocratic Panchayat system. Under autocratic monarchical rule various land reforms were carried out but they did not benefit the peasants because the beneficiaries were the village elites. Nevertheless, the slogan of ‘*jasko jot, usko pot*’ [land to the tiller] has remained popular among the peasants for
decades. After the re-establishment of the democratic system in 1990, political parties on both the right and the left that contested elections in 1991 and 1994 included land reform in their election manifestos, thus raising peasants’ expectations again. However, promised-land reforms were not put into practice by subsequent governments (Joshi and Mason 2007). Accordingly, land reform remained an important but unresolved issue and the Maoists were able to exploit it successfully to mobilise peasants for involvement in the insurgency.

In discussions, it was revealed that the Maoists often asked villagers to provide wealth or a family member, particularly a son or a daughter, for the cause of the people’s war. An informant said that the Maoists asked people to, ‘either give your son or your daughter. Either give money or give human labour’ (B33, FGD, male, 60 years, Bahun-Chhetri, Dhankuta district, 16 April 2009). The Maoists used a campaign with the slogan ‘ek dhuri ek jan, hoina bhane de dhan’ [give one person from a family or give money/wealth].

When the Maoists asked people to join with them, they promised that the Maoist Party would take care of families who made these sacrifices. So those who did not join the Maoists thought that Maoist supporters got monthly salaries. However, during this study no family was found that received regular financial support from the Maoists. A few families received some money to celebrate Dashain [national festival] and some got support for treatment when they became sick. For example, the mother of a Maoist who was killed during the war said, ‘I heard that martyr’s families are getting support … I have not got those supports. In last Dashain, Person M1 came and gave me Rs 1,000’ (B24, Int, female, 55 years, Bahun-Chhetri, Morang district, 09 April 2009).

4.3.2. Attractions to Join the Civil Conflict

Apart from the attraction of land reform, it was evident that many poor people were attracted to join the Maoists because they got free food, clothes and daily goods that were not readily available. They were also supported for medical treatment if they became sick or injured. Individuals who had worked for the Maoists or became Maoists confirmed that they received these benefits. For example, a Tamang Maoist said, ‘we did not get any salary … We were provided with simple dress, a pair of sandals, a pair
of shoes, trousers or pants, vest, two shirts and one blanket. We also got books, notebooks, pens, pencils, tooth-paste and tooth-brush’ (T08, FGD, male, 41 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 16 March 2009).

However, there were negative economic consequences for many in joining or supporting the insurgency especially if they were rich. Some Maoist supporters who left home for the struggle complained that they had lost family income because of their participation in the people’s war. For example, one of the informants who was richer than T08 above explained, ‘I am a Maoist … in 2001 I had started a hotel in Place T1. I sold the hotel after one year because I had to return to my village … I became the secretary of the ward committee for the Maoists. … I had established a flour mill in the village. I sold the mill … I have experienced ups and downs in my life … The conflict has caused my family to suffer in every respect’ (T12, FGD, male, 45 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 17 March 2009). However, no Bahun-Chhetri informants expressed such experiences. On the other hand, Tamang informants reported that there were cases where Bahun-Chhetri Maoist workers who had collected money from villages escaped to India or abroad with the collected money. There was a clear indication from the Tamang informants that Bahun-Chhetris joined the Maoists to earn money while Tamangs worked for the Maoists to fulfil their daily needs.

Money collection by the Maoists was one of the intensive activities in rural villages. Many research participants reported that they did not receive a receipt when they gave money to the Maoists. For example, when an informant who gave Rs 25,000 to the Maoists was asked whether the Maoists gave him a receipt, he said, ‘no, they did not’ (T10, Int, male, 72 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 17 March 2009). An informant who had worked for the Maoists said that if someone did not receive a receipt then the money was not collected by the Maoists. He said, ‘that was not collected by the Maoist Party. False people must have taken the money’ (T08, Int, male, 41 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 16 March 2009). So perhaps T10’s money did not go to the Maoist Party. T08 said, ‘I collected a lot of money, around one million rupees. We provided receipts and kept one half of the receipts for our record. If I had not handed over the money, I would have been punished by the [Maoist] Party’. By saying this he, like many other Maoist workers, claimed that the Party had a very good system for monitoring the money matters. Regarding this, another Maoist said, ‘I had to submit receipts of the
money collection and I also had to show records of the expenditures’ (T17, Int, male, 55 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 19 March 2009). They also said that they had punished some of the fraudulent money collectors. For example, an informant said, ‘once we had paid Rs 2,200 as a donation for a program … Later, we asked the Maoists but learnt that the money was not received by them. The money collector was from Place K3 … The Maoists told us they punished him’ (T02, Int, male, 39 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 16 March 2009). However, this informant did not know what punishment was served to the false money collector.

Elsewhere, it was stated that some of Maoist workers were killed by the Party itself because the workers misused collected money and did not improve their personal behaviour. Explaining about a case, an informant said,

He misused money for his alcohol … The Maoist army found him and gave a few chances for improvement. He did not improve his behaviour … villagers reported that he was not a good man. He collected money, threatened villagers and abused them after drinking alcohol. He used his gun to threaten people. Then the Maoist army killed him. When he was killed, I learnt that he had Rs 10,000 in his pocket (T31, Int, male, 57 years, Tamang, Morang district, 07 April 2009).

Elsewhere it seems some villagers did give money to a proper Maoist but the person did not issue a receipt. For example, a school teacher reported, ‘yes they were local Maoists. We did not know whether the [Maoist] Party received the money or not. They did not give us a receipt’ (T09, Int, male, 30 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 17 March 2009). This implies there were opportunities for an individual to gain private income by joining the Maoists, although there were also obviously risks. According to Collier and Hoeffler (2004), the opportunities for individuals to gain private income is ‘greed’ that contributes to cause civil war.

4.3.3. People’s Expectations Unmet

Generally, rural people expected to get from the Maoists an equal distribution of land and wealth, and reduction of poverty. Yet, although previous governments had not been able to address people’s expectations adequately, they had initiated some steps by
introducing five-year development plans and allocating the national budget at local government levels. Reports show some positive impacts of earlier government initiatives. For example, an assessment of poverty in Nepal shows that the incidence of poverty declined dramatically even during the civil war, falling from 42 per cent in 1995/96 to 31 per cent in 2003/04 (World Bank 2006). In fact, Nepal had been steadily transitioning towards a more equal distribution of development and income opportunities after 1990.

A broad-based study of developing countries shows that countries in such a transition phase are more likely to experience a higher frequency of internal conflict (Kim 2006). Kim (2006) argues that internal conflict increases more during a transitional period toward a more equitable distribution among diverse populations. This may be because initiatives to more equally distribute development and income opportunities are rarely applied equally in all parts of the country. This argument is relevant to Nepal because, while Nepal achieved an overall poverty reduction target, many rural villages and remote districts were left behind while Nepal was in a transition period. Specific to Nepal, another study shows that districts with Maoist control had higher poverty rates (Hatlebakkk 2009), further illustrating the point. Hatlebakkk’s study suggests that land inequality and income poverty were significant contributing factors to the civil conflict in rural Nepal. Therefore, the Maoists were able to recruit poor people into their organizations more easily, including into the People’s Liberation Army (PLA).

In summary, Nepal has long faced problems of unequal distribution of land and wealth. Unequal resource distribution exists between the landed elite and tenant farmers (Joshi and Mason 2007), between urban the rich and rural poor, and between regional, racial, ethnic, linguistic and religious groups (Pyakuryal and Uprety 2005). Subsequent democratically-elected governments attempted to deliver ‘distributive justice’ but their efforts strengthened inequalities, perhaps because they tried to use existing socio-economic structures for their own vested political interests (Upreti 2006). As indicated above, existing low socio-economic status fuelled the people’s war launched because rural people perceived the Maoists as a new agent of change in a context where other political parties had not fulfilled their hopes. Their perception and participation in the war was intertwined and complex. The meaning of the act of joining or supporting the
Maoists was not only to call for a responsive government but to fulfil some basic immediate needs.

4.4. Gender Discrimination and Women’s Participation in the Conflict

The previous sections analysed why people participated in the insurgency and how a poor governance system and a low socio-economic status caused the civilian population, both men and women, to suffer. This section considers women’s participation in the civil conflict and argues that pervasive gender discrimination encouraged more Nepali women to join the insurgency. Below, a discussion of gender discrimination presents accounts from women in the conflict-affected areas.

Women’s participation in the ten year civil war was significant. They took arms and fought in the frontline. For example, one unknown woman courageously started firing at the government army. One of the research participants who had witnessed the firing told the story:

My youngest son returned from school early and hurriedly … Somebody had told him that the Maoists were going to attack … The vehicles coming from below moved close to the river side. The vehicle drivers said there was a high possibility of fighting between the Maoists and the royal army. I watched on the walls of the hills and saw approximately two hundred people walking fast … They were carrying weapons and disappeared after a while. I did not know where they were hiding in the landscape. I was watching a long-haired girl with a rifle in a position to attack in that Kulo [tunnel] … That girl fired first and then firing started which sounded surprisingly like hail. The royal army were coming in two vehicles (T01, Int, male, 48 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 15 March 2009).

This story shows how a sole woman soldier initiated an attack against the government’s well-trained army. The government’s attempt to suppress the insurgency by killing opponents forced many women to join the Maoists. For example, one of the informants said, ‘Person D4 belonging to an indigenous community … was killed by the security forces. His wife handed over their children to the grandparents. She also joined the
Maoists’ (B16, FGD, male, 67 years, Bahun-Chhetri, Morang district, 08 April 2009). This is an extreme situation where a woman chose to fight against the government.

Another informant who was a casual cook in a police post was also trapped in battle in 2002. He witnessed an extreme act of revenge by female combatants against government security personnel. He said,

The Maoists entered our room by breaking the windows with the butts of their guns. The women Maoists came first. They asked us to surrender. Two policemen who were together with me did not have guns. If they had guns, we could have died. We surrendered to them and survived … A Maoist woman had cut another policeman on his neck with a *khukuri* [a traditional Nepalese knife] (T25, Int, male, 23 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 21 March 2009).

From these accounts, we can feel a sense of extreme situations in which women fought in the cause of the Maoists. They accepted the frightening, lawless situations of the war in the hope that they would bring happiness and ease to people like themselves (Leve 2007). In Nepal, women have been suffering at the hands of the state and patriarchal society for a very long time.

4.4.1. Deep-rooted Socio-cultural Discriminatory Practices

Violence and discrimination against women have been practised in Nepal for centuries. Women face violence and discrimination from the beginning to the end of their lives. The following discussions elaborate some of those deep-rooted practices that compelled women to participate in the war. They became aware that a main reason for the discrimination they experienced was the oppressive state, a system of poor governance.

Many women (Figure 4.1) joined the Maoists because the traditional patriarchal structure of the family had been oppressing them. State institutions were not efficient in listening and providing justice to them. They perceived the Maoist camp as a means to seek their rights.
The following story of a Tamang woman represents an example of a case of gender discrimination.

I first got married to a boy in Place P3 … I was only 18 years old and I was not wise … My parents asked my husband’s family to give me two *tola* [23.238 grams] of gold. They gave me only one and a half *tola*. As per the tradition, they brought *Baakhraa Koseli* [the gifts of bread, local alcohol, a goat and roosters] to my parents that was not asked for … Gradually misunderstandings increased … My father-in-law, my mother-in-law and my sister-in-law were abusing me. I could not bear them. I also shouted at them … The quarrel began after five months of the marriage. I told my husband that I would do better to join the Maoists instead of quarrelling at home … We left for the [Maoist] Party from Place N1 (T24, Int, female, 34 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 20 March 2009).

The excerpt explains how a woman got married traditionally and what happened because of traditional socio-cultural practices. The woman suffered from a misunderstanding in relation to traditional practices resulting in quarrelling with her parents-in-law and, eventually, abandonment of her home to join the Maoists together with her husband as a remedy for the discrimination. During the civil conflict, the Maoists handled many such cases and tried to settle the dispute locally. In cases of
marriages, love affairs or sexual relationship disputes, their sympathy was in favour of women. They made the local people decide what was right for the victim. The following is an example of such cases.

A school headmaster had a sexual relationship with his student. The girl became pregnant and delivered a child [in her parent’s home] ... The Maoists knew about the events and they came. They organised a public meeting, formed a judgement committee from the villagers and commanded them to call the headmaster and the girl. Then the headmaster and the girl were presented. The judgement committee was commanded to decide appropriately. They decided that the headmaster must accept the girl as his second wife and he must take care of the newborn baby … The Maoists also ordered him to reimburse the expenses that were spent to look after the new baby and his mother. The headmaster paid Rs 25,000 (T21, FGD, male, 61 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 19 March 2009).

The account shows that the Maoists tried to show sympathy for a woman who suffered from gender discrimination. They usually settled disputes through public involvement. In the case presented above, as per the recommendation of the social committee, they forced the man to take the woman as a wife. It was done despite the fact that the man had already another wife and children from her. It indicates that the Maoists attempted to satisfy social demands at village level.

Traditionally, Nepalese women could not exercise the right to choose their husbands because they got married very early. One of the women informants said, ‘I met my husband the first time in my marriage ceremony ... His parents continued begging me for more than a year and my parents arranged the marriage when I was only 14 years old … They did not ask me whether I wanted to get married’ (B29, Int, female, 50 years, Bahun-Chhetri, Morang district, 12 April 2009). This shows the fact that patriarchal social traditions meant young girls got married early. This situation has not improved much even today. The latest demographic and health survey shows that 60 per cent of Nepalese women are married by the age of 18 and only 22 per cent are married after the age of 20 years (MOHP et al 2007).
Similarly, Nepalese women are forced to deliver many children despite their desires and decisions. Regarding this, an informant said, ‘I have three daughters and the last one was a son ... Everyone said I had to bear at least one son. My parents also suggested the same. If I did not bear a son, my husband’s descent generation would have been ended. Hence, I bore many children’ (B05, Int, female, 35 years, Bahun-Chhetri, Kavre district, 14 March 2009). Women may have to bear many children because of the traditional preference for a male child. Another woman also verified this fact. She said, ‘my son is the fifth living child ... I bore five daughters before him because I waited for a son. We have a very bad tradition. When I did not bear a son, my in-laws wanted my husband to marry another woman or adopt my husband’s younger brother. They said the younger brother would inherit my property. How could I do that? ... I waited patiently and accepted many difficulties. At last I delivered a son’ (B15, Int, female, 50 years, Bahun-Chhetri, Morang district, 08 April 2009).

On average, Nepalese women begin childbearing before they turn 20 years (MOHP et al 2007) and continue until a woman delivers a son or her childbearing ceases naturally. The preference for a son is not only a tradition but is also a government imposed necessity. This is because, under the existing laws, the inheritance of property does not go to a woman. Therefore, if a woman does not bear a son, she has to face many difficulties and has to live in uncertainty. The following account shows this situation.

I got married in 1962. My husband died 24 years ago ... I have three daughters. In the beginning, I suffered a lot because I did not deliver a son. There was lots of pressure to deliver a son. Both my family members and neighbours pressured me. Whatever people said, I accepted ... All my daughters got married and are living on their own ... I was supposed to live here with the eldest son of my youngest brother-in-law. He is living in Kathmandu with his family. I do not know what he will do and how long he will stay in Kathmandu (B07, Int, female, 59 years, Bahun-Chhetri, Kavre district, 14 March 2009).

A further discussion with B07 revealed that she got much less land than her husband inherited from his father. Despite the current law that allows a widow to acquire all her husband’s properties, practically, she received only a small share. The remaining property was divided between her husband’s brothers and their sons, making her
subordinate to them. More seriously, she does not have any guarantee for her care, health and life. The government has not provided any mechanisms to claim her full rights despite the provision of a favourable law.

We can see from these examples how women have been subordinated in Nepalese society. As women became aware of these discriminatory practices, particularly during the 1990s, they began to find ways to liberate themselves. In the given socio-political context of Nepal, supporting the Maoists or joining their camp seemed to be one of the best alternatives. Therefore, they participated in the war.

4.4.2. Discriminatory Laws and Regulations

Discriminatory laws and regulations that impacted women’s daily lives compelled many women to support the Maoists. Summarising state-protected discriminatory practices and describing her sufferings, one of the women informants who got involved in politics after her marriage said the following:

In my time, if I did not get up at 3 a.m. with mother and if I did not look after the goats I did not get a meal. We women are always oppressed by males. In our childhood we are controlled by our father and brothers. When we get married we are controlled by our husband and father-in-law. In our old age we are controlled by sons. We have to always live under someone and under their control. I learnt from the politics that we can get equal rights ... Women were not allowed to travel and study. If a woman studied, she was accused of being a witch. I was born in Place R1. I went to study for 10 to 15 days. After that I was beaten every day for that sin. I was accused of trying to be a witch. Later, I attended adult literacy classes but I had to look after my children and home. In 1972, my husband was jailed. Then I had to bear torture from my mother-in-law, brothers-in-law and their wives. I was in a great distress (T32, Int, female, 50 years, Tamang, Morang district, 07 April 2009).

Later, T32 joined the Maoists and mobilised villagers to support the Maoists. Not only this woman but many other women travelled to different places and asked women to support the war. For the purpose of increasing people’s support, the women carried out a campaign called ‘one village, one unit, one house and one friend’ (Yami 2007, p 44).
One of the informants who was approached by the Maoist women said, ‘female Maoists used to say, “we are women. How long should we use spades? We cannot gain our rights by staying at home and carrying out household chores”. This was really true’ (T04, Int, female, 20 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 16 March 2009). Like this young woman, many others agreed with the Maoists and supported their cause.

The Maoist women did not mobilise only females but they also convinced males. One of the informants said that he was impressed by the Maoists who asked him to join with them. Eventually, he married the woman Maoist who was one of those who had approached him in the beginning. During an interview, he said, ‘I left home for the Maoist Party on 25 June 2003 ... I was impressed with the Maoists that included my wife ... I was suffering and realised that I should fight against the oppressors ... my wife has been an active member of the Party since 1999’ (T26, Int, male, 22 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 28 March 2009). These accounts show examples of many people, both men and women, who joined the Maoists because of the women Maoists. Women’s active participation in the Maoist-led civil war was a by-product of the existing discriminatory laws and regulations.

Even after the 1990s reform period, due to continued poor governance and leadership, many of the existing laws and regulations remained discriminatory against women (Subedi 2009; Banda 2008; Pandey et al 2006). An analysis report shows discriminatory provisions in 118 Clauses/Sections/Rules, two Rules in their entirety, and 67 Schedules/Annexes/Forms in 54 different laws including the Constitution (Pandey et al 2006, p 51). Discriminatory provisions were related to property rights, nationality and citizenship, women and employment, health and reproductive rights, marriage and family rights, and legal and court proceedings. Women, particularly those who participated in the civil conflict, were well aware of these legal short-comings.

4.4.3. Women’s Actions against Discriminations

The women Maoists sometimes punished men if they did something wrong. Their actions could be brutal and that raised male aggression against revolutionary women during the conflict. The following excerpt represents men’s resentment against revolutionary women during the conflict.
There was a Maoist woman … She was the worst woman. She was a Bhaalu [a prostitute]! She punished men if they were married to two women. She was married to two men. She had left the first and gone with a new one. She was not punished! Under her leadership many men suffered (T05, FGD, male, 20 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 16 March 2009).

Despite their anger, the males were not in a position to act against the Maoist women. Generally speaking though, the actions of Maoist women did not reduce people’s support for the Maoists but increased the support in reality.

Other women did not join the Maoists but supported the war in different ways. Many provided food, shelter and information to the Maoists. Some women helped the Maoist patients who were injured during the war. The following gives an example of notable support that the Maoists received from women:

They came more than 100 times. They were 16 to 17 in a group. Once I finished up 100 kilos of rice within a week. They stayed continuously at my home … In addition to my farm rice, I spent more than 10,000 rupees to buy rice for them … They used to bring injured people who were dying. Some were hardly breathing. Some were followed by the government army when they were removing bullets from the wound. I could not say not to stay at my home because of humanity … I thought they might have pain like that I experienced. They were my brothers and sisters … The Maoists did not fight for their own sake (B20, Int, female, 40 years, Bahun-Chhetri, Morang district, 09 Aril 2009).

This account was taken from an interview with a woman who did not get the opportunity to go to school as she was a girl. She supported the Maoists during the conflict though her husband was not at home. She was living with two small sons in her village. Her house was known as the ‘Maoist’s Hospital’ during the conflict period.

By appealing to women’s sense of injustice about their situation of suffering, the Maoists were able to attract many women to work for them because they promised to eliminate discrimination against women. A study carried out in 2002/03 showed that
women were active in all Maoist institutions at all levels (Yami 2007). According to Yami (2007), one-third of the Maoist soldiers were women. Some of the women commanded both male and female soldiers and most of them fought courageously on the front line against the government’s professional army.

However, women were not free from discrimination while they worked for the Maoists. More than 78 per cent of Maoist women reported that gender discrimination was present (Yami 2007). The extent of discrimination ranged from missing out on promotion to a higher post to sexual exploitation. More than 52 per cent of Maoist women reported the existence of sexual exploitation in the Maoist organisation (Yami 2007). Because of the ill-treatment, unwanted sex and rape, some women had to escape from the Maoists (Shakya 2003). The condition of those women who suffered from these actions is generally unknown as they do not dare to speak in public.

Although many women participated in the war, the people’s war was led by a majority of male Maoists. Moreover, the analysis presented above shows that gender discrimination and violence against women were not eliminated by the participation of the women in the war. However, the conflict created a new identity that suggested Nepalese women are great fighters, and established a new norm that women can also carry weapons if needed. During the civil conflict, they led Maoist activities independently and together with their male counterparts. At home, many women served the Maoists, either providing food or hiding them from the government security forces.

If even a civil war cannot reduce gender discrimination, it raises many questions about how discrimination against women can be reduced. However, this question falls beyond the scope of this thesis.

4.5. Revisiting the Causes of the Civil Conflict

Recently, many scholars have studied the causes of the civil conflict (see Hoeffler 2011; Murshed and Tadjoeddi 2009; Sen 2008; Aylward 2007; Joshi and Mason 2007; Leve 2007; Thoms and Ron 2007; Murshed and Gates 2005; Pyakuryal and Uprety 2005; Collier and Hoeffler 2004). Such studies vary based on the scholars’ background, interest, experience and their perceptions of the manifestations. For example, Thoms
and Ron (2007) studied violence from a human rights perspectives to show how human rights violations are associated with a specific civil conflict. Murshed and Gates (2005) explain that the main cause of the civil conflict in Nepal is horizontal inequality, that is, group differences based on caste, ethnicity and geographical locations; on the key issues of landlessness, the debt burden of the rural poor; and access to employment. However, Nepalese people’s accounts explained above demonstrate that a wider of local causes are behind the specific civil conflict in Nepal.

More frequently, economists have analysed causes of the civil conflict with a focus on economic variables. Collier and Hoeffler (2004) analysed conflict-related data from 98 countries during the period 1960 to 1992. They concluded that rebellions are ‘greed motivated’ and grievances motivate rebels to ‘disconnect from the large social concerns of inequality, political rights, and ethnic or religious identity’ (p 589). Their theory of greed and grievance is popular in the academic field of studying civil conflicts. The greed and grievances explanation has also influenced donor policies to address poverty and civil conflicts in the developing countries (Murshed and Tadjoeddin 2009). In essence, none of the studies are solely able to explain the causes of the civil conflict (Aylward 2007). Different studies including the current one have been complementary to each other to enhance our knowledge in the field of civil conflict.

The causes of the civil conflict should be analysed from a holistic point of view. In other words, it may be wrong to examine one or other causes in isolation. Therefore, the findings of this study support Amartya Sen’s assertion that ‘causal connections must call for a serious integration of political, social and cultural analysis with investigations of the hard realities of economic deprivation’ (Sen 2008, p 13). The experiences of the rural people show that there are multiple underlying causes of the civil conflict in Nepal. The following diagram (Figure 4.2) shows these causes and I have named them as ‘the wheel of underlying causes of the civil conflict’.

Figure 4.2 illustrates that there are numerous causes of the civil conflict, of which some are clearly visible, others are indicative, and some invisible at any point of time. Some of the people who suffered from these causes took leadership in trying to lessen their suffering and they joined with other people having similar experiences; making a group of rebellion or forming an association or an organisation. Eventually, their actions took

Figure 4.2: The wheel of underlying causes of civil conflict

The diagram indicates that the people suffering from these causes are living in the society while the people responsible for actions to reduce their suffering are in the government or in the institutions protected by the government. When an existing government does not address people’s suffering, or if its actions are inadequate, then the suffering people’s actions take a form of a civil conflict that aims to overthrow the old government to create a path to form a new government.

4.6. Conclusion

This chapter has discussed experiences of the civil conflict drawn from accounts of people living in rural areas. It was demonstrated that the causes of the civil conflict are multiple, intertwined, interconnected, overlapping and, most of the times, dependent on each other. It is further evident that the main cause of the civil conflict was poor
governance and distributive injustice. The areas that most quickly supported the Maoist insurgency were poor rural areas where many low socio-economic status people were living. Poverty and lack of opportunities fuelled the conflict. Given the pattern of gender discrimination in Nepal, women participated on the Maoist side in the conflict in the hope of redressing the inequalities and injustices practised against them. Despite the fact that the Maoist camp was not free from gendered violence and discrimination, women kept on fighting with the hope of bringing happiness and ease to women’s lives one day. They fought in the war against the repressive government and its agencies, demonstrating that women were not weaker than male counterparts.

Poor rural people participated in the conflict to end inequality and bring justice. The stories of the rural people clearly show that the Maoists got swift and massive support because almost everyone in the rural areas was living under low socio-economic conditions. During the civil conflict, the poor perceived the rich as their opponents and, sometimes, took violent action against them. The rich were not so much punished just because they owned more wealth. They were punished more because they became richer and richer by exploiting many people of low socio-economic status. Earlier government initiatives to improve socio-economic status did not meet rural people’s expectations and requirements. Even after 1990, the distribution of resources and opportunities to improve rural socio-economic status remained unchanged because of the poor governance system. Poor rural people found that the Maoist camp could provide their immediate needs of food, clothing and medical assistance. Using the poor governance and injustice as a tool of leverage, the Maoist leaders exploited rural people’s emotions. Eventually, they succeeded in mobilising them for the war against the government forces.

Unfortunately, during the 10 years of civil conflict, the general public, particularly villagers, were trapped between the different registers of brutality, intimidation and loyalty carried out both by government agents and Maoists. The conflict resulted in the most difficult situations for the poorest people. The next chapter elaborates on who the ‘oppressed’ people were, and on whose behalf the Maoists promised to take over.
Chapter 5. Reconstruction of Identities during the Civil Conflict

5.1. Introduction

Complementing the focus in the previous chapter on governance, socio-economic status and gender, this chapter examines experiences of the civil conflict from the perspectives of religion, caste, ethnicity and class. The Nepalese population is initially described. The following sections demonstrate interplays and contests of power between people of different religions, castes, ethnic identities and class positions during the insurgency. It is concluded that the conflict in Nepal re-defined the old boundaries of identity and has resulted in some reconstruction of identities among the people of Nepal.

First, it is worthwhile noting that there is sometimes confusion when the terms ‘ethnicity’, ‘caste’ and ‘ethnic groups’ are used. Nepalese government officials use ‘caste/ethnic group’ (for example, CBS 2002) to denote the people they refer to; and academics use ‘caste/ethnicity’ to denote their typical study populations (for example, Bhattachan 2003; Dahal 2003). In a recent document, the government used ‘caste/ethnicity’ while reporting population details according to different groups (CBS 2008). It seems that there is confusion on the use of terms because of lack of adequate translatability between languages: Nepali and English. As Gellner (1997, p 16) notes, this confusion is also a practical problem because of the political nature of these terms, while denoting or representing a group of Nepalese people. Debate on the correct use of these terms is beyond the scope of this thesis. Therefore, here the terms are employed interchangeably. The term indigenous is less ambivalent and refers to the original inhabitants of the land.

Both indigenous and non-indigenous peoples live in Nepal. Indigenous peoples account for at least 37 per cent of the Nepalese population. Although the census has been recorded since 1911, ethnicity-based information was collected only after the re-establishment of democracy in 1990. The 1991 census reported 59 caste/ethnic groups and the census of 2001 increased the recognised number of caste/ethnic groups to 101 (CBS 2008, 2002; Dahal 2003). In 2002, the Government of Nepal officially published
a list of 59 ethnic groups under the category of indigenous peoples (HMG 2002). Seventeen of the 59 indigenous groups were not listed in the census 2001. Dahal (2003) notes that it is difficult to estimate the exact number of various caste/ethnic groups, their distribution and population size because a comprehensive anthropological and linguistics survey has not yet been carried out in Nepal. In the census of 2001, detailed demographic information was collected only for 22.74 million whereas the total population was estimated to be 23.15 million (CBS 2002, 2008), clearly indicating that about a half million people living in the Maoist controlled zone were not recorded. It should be noted that the 2001 census was flawed due to Maoist control of some areas.

The 2001 census showed that the population of Nepal is multi-ethnic, multi-religious, geographically diverse and unevenly distributed. Despite this diversity, a system of discrimination based on religion was imposed by the state when modern Nepal was founded in 1968. The founder of modern Nepal, King Prithvi Narayan Shah, declared ‘yo asal Hindustan ho’ [this is the true land of Hindus] (Gurung 1997). He declared himself as ‘Hindupati’ [a supreme and holy title meaning Hindu King] (Pandey et al 2006) and implemented law and order as prescribed by Hinduism. Later, Prime Minister Junga Bahadur Rana introduced Muluki Ain [National Code of Nepal 1854] that promulgated a single caste hierarchy for the entire population in Nepal (Geiser 2005; Bhattachan 2003; Whelpton 1997). The national code transposed Hinduism and the caste system as two sides of the same coin, bringing about exclusion and suppression of other religions and ethnic identities. Yet, most indigenous peoples do not follow Hinduism. Many of them follow Buddhism and Christianity. They also have their own spiritual practices. Despite this fact, the dominance of Hinduism protected by the state continued even after the re-establishment of the multi-party democratic system in 1990. Moreover, the constitution of 1990 formally identified Nepal as a Hindu state (Pandey et al 2006), reinforcing the dominance of Hinduism over other faiths and legitimising superiority of high caste people over indigenous peoples.

Therefore, identity-related discriminations and inequalities are deep-rooted in Nepalese history. The state, overwhelmingly dominated by high caste people, attempted to reduce inequalities during the second half of the last century through constitutional change by carrying out different development plans and policies but it could not succeed at the expected level. In fact, state-sponsored development projects compounded the
structured inequalities relating to religion, class and ethnicity (Tamang 2002). This reverse effect might have been due to prejudice and/or lack of capacity to understand dynamics of transformation among indigenous and low caste peoples. The state did not provide an empowering environment for the marginalised groups to take advantage of opportunities. The indigenous and low caste peoples were excluded in political, social and economic structures (Gurung 2006).

The Maoists launched their project of the ‘people’s war’ in this complex context by applying basic principles of class struggle based on communist ideology. People can debate whether the Maoists interpretation of ‘class structure’ and ‘class struggle’ in Nepal was correct. The truth is: marginalised people especially indigenous and low caste peoples perceived the Maoist claim positively. They opposed identity-related discriminations and inequalities, allowing Maoist control to be established in almost all rural areas over a period of 10 years.

5.2. Intervening in Religion and Socio-cultural Traditions

Religions prescribe different socio-cultural practices for different faith groups. For example, death rituals are different for high castes and low castes, and for Hindus, Christians and Buddhists. These differences do not really matter as long as some of the different groups of people do not experience discrimination and inequality. It can be argued that discrimination based on religion and caste continued in Nepalese society because of the constitutionally-sanctioned dominance of Hinduism. Such discrimination was opposed during the civil conflict. The following sub-sections demonstrate examples of oppositional actions.

5.2.1. Opposing Different Rituals

Informants reported that the Maoists opposed socio-cultural discriminatory practices during the conflict. The following account from an interview shows an act of such opposition.

People had to suppress their own rites during the civil conflict. For example, the Bahun caste performs Shradda [an annual death ritual] and offers Pinda [a ball of
cooked rice] for their dead parents. If the Maoists saw this happening during the conflict, they used to feed the *Pinda* to the son who was performing *Shraddha*. This type of behaviour was usually done by Dalits [lower caste]. The Dalits do not offer *Pinda* to their dead parents. They offer rice grains. The main fact is: the other castes should not touch anything in the *Shraddha* ceremony and the *Pinda* offering. The Dalits entered into our kitchen. On first sight, it was bad. Our own religious laws were violated. Now, I think it was alright. I cooked for and fed them (B01, Int, male, 42 years, Bahun-Chhetri, Kavre district, 13 March 2009).

This account illustrates two facts about oppositional actions. Firstly, Hinduism prescribes different death rituals for the Bahuns-Chhetris, the higher caste and for Dalits, the lower caste. During the conflict, the Maoists opposed this distinction by intervening in rituals carried out by the higher caste. Secondly, Dalits, who were not allowed to enter higher caste people’s houses, went through into the kitchen and dined there. None of the informants reported that the Tamangs got directly involved in attacking the Bahun-Chhetris because of religious practices. Of course, it was reported that many Tamangs boycotted *Dashain* and *Tihar* [the great Hindu Festivals]. One Maoist said, ‘we got rid of *Dashain* and *Tihar*. We celebrated *Lhochhaar* [New Year]. The Tamangs were indulging in alcoholic beverages’ (T08, Int, male, 41 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 16 March 2009). These actions symbolically challenged the Hinduism and the caste system.

5.2.2. Violating Food Prohibitions

The Maoists often performed forms of violence against the high caste people, many involving violation of food prohibitions. As mentioned above, Maoists carried out symbolic violence against the high caste Bahuns because they usually practised food prohibitions. The following is an example of such a violation.

The Maoists carried pig meat into the Bahun houses and cooked it in their kitchens. Pigs are untouchable for the Bahuns. Two to four families were displaced from Place S2 because of that reason. If you did not eat pork, they used to feed you forcefully (B03, Int, male, 35 years, Bahun-Chhetri, Kavre district, 14 March 2009).
This story was told by a school teacher who was working in a remote village. The village was mainly populated by the Tamangs and the Magars. The Tamangs and the Magars are Janajatis and they generally consume pig-flesh. They are considered to be of a lower caste than the Bahuns in the state-imposed caste hierarchy system. In that village, there were only a few Bahun households that suffered from violations by the low-caste Maoists because of their traditional high caste practices. The teacher said that the atrocities were not carried out by local Maoists but by Maoists who came from other villages.

According to Hinduism, pigs are unholy animals. Upper caste Hindus are restricted from eating pig-flesh. The Dalits grow pigs and eat their flesh, as do other tribal groups in Nepal. Traditional high caste Hindus despise people who consume pig-flesh. During the conflict, the Dalits took revenge against the centuries-old hatred and prejudice against them by taking actions that caused the Bahuns to suffer. The revenge involving pig meat was so offensive that the high caste families were forced to leave the village. Though direct involvement of the Tamangs was not reported, we can see their indirect involvement here. The Tamang Maoists admitted that they supported the Dalits in such actions. Interactions with the informants also revealed that many cows were killed and fed to the Maoist soldiers. Traditional Hindus do not kill but worship the cows, considering them Goddess Laxmi, the Goddess of wealth and prosperity.

5.2.3. Enforcing a Ban on Alcohol

The civil conflict led by the Maoists attempted to rationalise different socio-cultural practices to create a moral society. During the conflict, the Maoists tried to stop many practices that were supposed to be bad for the society. This often involved trying to eradicate cultural practices common among non-Hindu Nepalese. Most ethnic groups, including Tamangs, consume alcoholic beverages traditionally and use alcohol in their socio-cultural events. The following story of a Tamang informant shows how they took action against the use of alcoholic drinks.

There are a few who joined the Maoists from this village. In 2005 the Maoist Party kept me in custody for three months. They did that to me because I opposed their attack on people’s businesses in my village. Some Maoists came to my village
without informing us and they damaged the property of people who sold alcoholic beverages in the village. They also collected a fine of Rs 100,000 on the spot. They suggested we consume alcoholic drinks in hiding, not publicly (T14, FGD, male, 27 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 18 March 2009).

From this story, we can see that the Maoists tried to stop people selling alcohol publicly but they allowed drinking in private. They used force to implement a puritanical culture and controlled people if they opposed their actions. Their actions varied from place to place because different local level Maoists were acting in the name of their Party, but really in terms of local interests. However, their prohibitionist actions did not last for long as such actions were against ethnic culture and traditions and they needed support in the struggle from ethnic groups such as the Tamangs. Although the Maoists did not officially believe in religion, they tried to impose a puritanical culture because most of the Maoist leaders were upper caste Hindus. As they had grown up in Hindu culture and Hinduism was the state religion, it seemed rational to them to try to impose a puritanical culture based on Hinduism. This created confusion and conflict even among the Maoist cadres.

The discussion above demonstrates that different types of long-standing discriminatory practices present in Nepal helped to fuel the civil conflict. These socio-cultural practices were based on religion and caste. Specifically, the domination of Hinduism favoured the higher caste Hindus; many high caste people maintained their discriminatory practices; and other people including lower caste Hindus and Janajatis opposed them. Lower caste people and most Janajatis including the Tamangs were suffering greatly from discrimination in all fields of social, economic and political life.

Dahal (2003) claims that religions other than Hinduism appear to have increased in Nepal from 1952/54 to 2001 because of appeals to ethnic identity politics in Nepal, especially after 1990. Buddhism and Kirat religions appear to have increased. According to Dahal, Christians increased more than 226 per cent between the 1991 and 2001 censuses. Until 1990, conversion of religion was prohibited and persons involved in conversion were punished and jailed (Dahal 2003; Gersony 2003). Nepalese people did not have freedom of religious choice. In other words, up to the 1990s, the state had suppressed people’s religious beliefs and faiths, compelling them to hide their real
faiths. After the 1990s, there was a partial freedom. Indigenous peoples who were not followers of Hinduism were asked to report their own religions, thus linking their ethnicity with religions other than Hinduism. During the civil conflict, religion and caste-related tensions increased. Lower caste and indigenous peoples presented themselves as equal to the high caste Bahun-Chhetris, indicating that their religion and socio-cultural practices were equally important as those of the Bahun-Chhetris. In summary, religious and ethnic factors contributed to the civil conflict, as they often do in multi-religious and multi-ethnic societies (Collier and Hoeffler 2004).

In fact, Nepal had already experienced religious tensions in the past. For example, uncontrolled riots in Kathmandu and other major cities in 2004 (Pandey et al 2006, p 75), Hindu-Muslim riots in 1995 (Gellner 1997, p 28) and expulsion of Buddhist activists in 1937 (Gurung 1997, p 525). Nine Christian leaders were gaol ed in 1980 (Gersony 2003, p 19). Gersony (2003, p 19) mentions that one of the arrested Christians in 1980 was a Maoist leader. These events of the past and evidence from this study show that religious tension in Nepal is fluid and may surface violently at any time if not carefully handled.

Nordas (2004) analysed the incidence of intrastate armed conflict incidence in the world in the period 1990–2002 to find that increasing religious cleavage and state religiosity intensifies the risk of intrastate armed conflict. His analysis shows that the risk of conflict increases if the state has an official state religion and persecutes religious minorities. What Nordas found is relevant to the Nepalese context. Religion and the caste system certainly contributed to intensify the civil conflict in Nepal.

In religiously heterogeneous Nepal, the state ignored ethnic diversity and tried to organise all people under a hierarchical caste system as prescribed by Hinduism. These tactics encouraged great resentment on the part of Dalits and non-Hindus that further fuelled the Maoist insurgency. Even before the insurgency, indigenous and other oppressed peoples’ movements were focused on the preservation and revitalisation of socio-cultural heritage. The decade-long civil conflict highly politicised these movements. Hence, socio-cultural movements became an unavoidable part of the political insurgency.
5.3. Dealing with Land Disputes and Class Structure

To a certain extent, class structure is built into traditions and cultural practices in Nepal. These practices create and maintain relationships between landlords and tenants. During the civil conflict, there were many incidents that targeted landlords.

5.3.1. Targeting Bahun-Chhetri Landlords

Discriminatory practices based on Hinduism have direct links to economic and livelihood opportunities. The following quote from an informant indicates the complexity of differential opportunities and how they were handled during the civil conflict.

We bought land but we could not use that land … Before I bought the land, someone was harvesting in that land … The harvester claimed for the Mohiyaani [right to have part of the harvested land] and registered a case in the court. He lost the case. Later, the landlord sold the land to me … I am a puret [domestic priest] and the seller is my jajamaan [a client of a domestic priest] … He donated 4 ropanis [0.208 hectares] in his dead father’s name and asked me whether I could buy the remaining 5 ropanis. Hence, I paid Rs 100,000 for 5 ropanis (B34, FGD, male, 55 years, Bahun-Chhetri, Dhankuta district, 16 April 2009).

This account indicates that one of the defining aspects of class position in Nepal is ownership of land. This account is also closely related to religious practice. To understand the complexity of class and religious position, we can recognise the involvement of three parties in the above account: a) a tenant-farmer or a supporter of the Maoists, b) current landlord and c) previous landlord. In this case, the tenant-farmer was a Rai, a member of an indigenous people, and could not own the land. The land owned by the previous high caste landlord was transferred to the current landlord (a domestic priest) who was also high caste. In other words, arable land from a high caste owner was transferred to another high caste man through the means of religion for economic benefit. A part of the land was transferred as a donation in the name of a dead family member and another part was sold at a low price. Economic opportunities have
long favoured the higher caste Hindus and imposed injustice on the lower castes and other powerless groups in the society. The civil conflict provided an opportunity for the powerless groups to claim their rights. Hence, wherever possible they forcefully captured lands of high caste landlords.

However, such forceful claims seemed to be temporary. The dispute was settled through the district peace committee immediately after the end of the civil war in 2006. B34 said, ‘finally in 09 December 2008, I got my land returned by paying Rs 22,000 to the ex-harvester. They did not give me anything for 6 years’ (B34, FGD, male, 55 years, Bahun-Chhetri, Dhankuta district, 16 April 2009). Using the civil conflict as an opportunity, the tenant-farmer had used the land for six years without paying a share to the landlord. This story confirms that by supporting the Maoists the tenant-farmer was able to negotiate for his rights. In the end, he received money for returning the land to the land owner but lost the land.

5.3.2. Targeting Tamang Landlords

During the civil war, dispute over land ownership also occurred among indigenous peoples. In one case, the tenant-farmer could not get land from the landlord even though they were from the same ethnic group. The following is an excerpt from the interview.

My grandfather’s clan brother had kept my father as his herdsman … The clan grandfather did not have any children and had promised to my father that he would give him some land. Before he gave officially any land to us, he died. His younger brother took over all of his brother’s properties and became the sole landlord. My father’s family grew up. They began to live separately and harvested the lands that they were harvesting in the past. When we grew up we demanded our own part but we did not get it. Instead, the landlord took over the land that we were harvesting for many years. We became homeless and landless. We registered a case and carried the case for more than 12 years. We could not win (T29, Int, male, 32 years, Tamang, Morang district, 07 April 2009).

As in the first case, we can see three actors forming a class position. The first actor is a herdsman who worked for the landlord because the landlord had promised to give him
some land. The second actor is the first landlord who did not have children. It meant that, as he did not have any child, his property would be transferred to his close relatives after he died. In this case, his property was transferred to his younger brother. The younger brother is the third actor who took over his brother’s property without giving any part to the herdsman. Eventually, the herdsman became a tenant-farmer and continued harvesting the same land. In the end he did not get any of the land for himself although he had farmed in it for many years, spending his whole life serving the landlords. Since the Tamang landlords were in a better economic position, they used every effort to defeat the claims of their tenant-farmers. Regarding this T29 said,

We did not have money to continue the case. He [the landlord] has properties and used those properties to defeat us … The Maoists punished him [the landlord] physically … we got our land … they provided us with justice that the court had not. I respected the [Maoist] Party and joined with them. My brother too joined the Maoist army (T29, Int, male, 32 years, Tamang, Morang district, 07 April 2009).

T29’s account emphasises that poor tenant-farmers in Nepal did not have enough money to pay for judiciary costs. In this disadvantaged situation, the civil war provided justice to the tenant-farmers (Figure 5.1).

Figure 5.1: Land justice and a place to live

The house and shed: The Maoists provided land to the family, recognising their rights as owners. The formal court had denied justice to the family.

Maoist claims of providing justice to poor farmers were overwhelmingly mentioned. The accounts of B34 and T29 show that Maoist decisions, even though temporary to some extent, favoured the tenant farmers. As a result, the poor farmers joined the
Maoists and worked for them. Many poor farmers experienced this kind of situation during the civil war. The Maoists forcefully captured landlords’ lands. The landlords became powerless because the Maoists exerted their military and political strength (Kattel 2003). For the purpose of increasing ordinary people’s support for the civil conflict, they organised public gatherings and openly discussed the issue of land ownership. At that time, many poor people found the Maoist rhetoric and practice to be compelling.

5.3.3. Attracting Lower Class People

During the interviews some high caste informants expressed the view that indigenous and lower class people were attracted to participate in the conflict because the propaganda and promises aroused emotions based on ethnicity and caste distinctions. One man said, ‘they used lower class people … because of the unnecessary sentiments of ethnicity, caste, class and geographical region … They have lied to people. They are deceiving people. This is just a tactic to get into government’ (B33, Int, male, 60 years, Bahun-Chhetri, Dhankuta district, 16 April 2009). In his view the Maoists exploited the resentments of the marginalised people, using ethnicity, caste and class to gain support for their leadership. Accounts of the Tamangs and poor Bahun-Chhetris confirmed this observation to be true to some extent. For example, one of the Tamang informants said,

I participated in the war to ensure food, clothes and shelter for everyone ... My daughter-in-law looked after the house and the farming ... Until now nothing good has happened for me through the conflict. I could not own private property. Lives of my family members were threatened. For some time, I had to hide them. The government security forces oppressed us (T17, Int, male, 55 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 19 March 2009).

Like T17, many indigenous peoples perceived the civil conflict itself as an opportunity to fulfil their basic needs and to uplift their status in the long run. Not only did the manipulation of needs by local Maoists gain them control in local government, it also improved their personal circumstances. The improved status of local Maoist leaders could be readily observed. During rural data collection even some of the village level Maoist leaders were riding motorbikes around the district centres and on nearby roads.
One informant confided, ‘in the beginning a Maoist named Person P1 had nothing. Nowadays he drives a motorbike. How did he earn that motorbike? ... Truly speaking, some people became millionaires after they joined the Maoists’ (T07, Int, male, 21 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 16 March 2009). The district level Maoist leader explained the acquisition of his motorbike as follows: the Maoist Party and ‘friends’ (businessmen) funded it for him. The rural poor people, particularly the indigenous Tamangs, joined the Maoist insurgency in the hope of adequate food, clothing and shelter for everyone in the future (see Karki and Seddon 2003; Singh et al 2002). Their needs were temporarily and partially addressed. However, they often suffered privation and even lost their limited means of survival.

It is clear in the discussion above that the poor farmers or so called lower class people joined the Maoists. Whether they were from the same or different ethnicity, they had not got their rights to land through state judiciary. According to the Tenancy Rights Acquisition Act (TRAA), first introduced following the democratic system in 1951 and amended frequently thereafter, a tenant is entitled to a part of land ownership. Legally, the tenant-farmers could claim one fourth of the land they cultivated. However, since the landlords rented out their land without proper legal documentation and uneducated tenant-farmers could not produce proper evidence, the tenants could not exercise their right to partial land ownership (Joshi and Mason 2007). Moreover, as the landlords were in a better economic position, they used every effort to defeat the claims of their tenant-farmers. Because they did receive their rightful share of land with the help of the Maoists, tenant-farmers supported them in the civil conflict to the best of their efforts (Pathak 2005).

Most indigenous peoples including the Tamangs do not own good arable lands because they live in upper hills/mountains. Hence, they own dry land and depend upon seasonal farming where they can produce a crop only once a year. It was mentioned in the interview that good arable land with a water supply can produce crops three to four times a year. Most of the good arable lands are owned by higher caste Hindus or, more rarely, by Janajati elites. The 2001 census shows that more than 70 per cent of arable land is controlled by 25 per cent of the population, mostly those living in the cities (Joshi and Mason 2008; CBS 2002), but farmed by tenant-farmers with few recognised rights. From this fact, we can see how it was possible that the Maoists gained support
for the civil conflict quickly in rural villages and succeeded in their proclamation of class struggle.

The Maoists launched the civil war based on the ‘universal principles of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism’ (Karki and Seddon 2003, p 258). They claimed that the war was primarily a class war but it also represented opposition to discrimination based on caste/ethnicity, language, religion, region and gender (Bhattachan 2003, p 38). This dual set of claims is evident from their historical documents, for example,

To develop class-consciousness among the peasants and to train them in the field of class struggle against feudal land ownership … peasants of the lower classes are the main force of the revolution, gravity of works should concentrate on the labourers and the lower classes of people in the cities … accelerate rural class struggle centring on the slogan of land to the tiller and concentrate main force on the same (UCPNM 2010, p 1).

In this extract, following Marx, the Maoists have identified ‘peasants of the lower classes’ as the main force of the war. They have also recognised labourers and lower classes of people in the cities as the important vehicles of the war. Day (2001, p 23) argues that ‘the relation between landowners and peasants can be seen as a class relation to the extent that the former owned the land upon which the latter worked’. Day continues, saying that ‘as we have seen, the landlord was able to exploit the peasants, extracting from them surplus value in the form of rents, labour services or agricultural produce’. From this perspective, the Nepalese civil war can be perceived as a ‘class struggle’.

5.4. Leading for the Desired Change

The civil war attracted many indigenous peoples and other marginalised groups not only to support the civil war but to lead the movement for desired change. Their participation was voluntary in the sense that they were not paid.
5.4.1. Ethnic Group Members Who Gained Local Power

When a district level Tamang Maoist leader was asked about his salary and benefits, he said he did not receive them. He explained that as Maoists, ‘we live with the people and work for them’. He stated that he would continue in his local leadership role, ‘we will continue to the end and until the suppressed people are uplifted. If we abandon the struggle in the middle of the process who will carry on? We have to continue our struggle to uplift the lower classes’. He explained that because he did not receive any income he supported his family with the assistance of ‘friends and villagers’, although the Party would pay for treatment if he became sick. He said that ‘I am working for the Party and the Party is looking after me’. The informant had a five month old baby. He continued,

I left home for the Maoist Party in 2003. I worked for the betterment of our people. Our time has not come yet. We have to learn a lot and raise awareness among people. We were suppressed by monarchs and past rulers ... The Party will arrange things for my child when I get upgraded to higher posts gradually. The Party supports us as per the individual’s capacity. As local leaders we rely on friends and people. I will not need to pay school fees for my child. I know some people who work in schools. So I will arrange for the education of my child through my contacts with them (T26, Int, male, 22 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 28 March 2009)

We can see how the civil conflict has uplifted this Tamang informant’s identity as a ‘leader’ so now he is not worried about himself or his family. He is working for the Maoist Party in the hope that his future will be as bright as that of his senior leaders. His hope for future family prosperity was strengthened because he saw uneducated senior co-workers become constituent assembly members. Talking about a Tamang constituent assembly member who was also holding the highest position in the district, a Bahun-Chhetri informant said,

There was a good Maoist here named Person L2. If he had not been killed, he could have taken Person L1’s seat … Person L2 had reached as far away as Place
B8 in organising their program … A spy [police] … informed his seniors. Then a team of police surrounded the meeting venue and shot at the Maoists. Person L2 had jumped from the roof of a house. He was shot dead. Person L2 had told me if the police did not harm them the Maoists would not attack the police. He was happy if the police were involved in punishing stupid people … After his killing the Maoists remained silent for a few months. Then one night the Maoists suddenly attacked the police station (B09, Int, male, 42 years, Bahun-Chhetri, Kavre district, 20 March 2009).

B09’s account shows that police attacked the Maoists when they were organising a public gathering. The police killed ‘a good Tamang leader’. Perhaps the leader was much more qualified than the current leaders, who did not intend to attack the police unnecessarily. This implies that the civil conflict killed many potential leaders. The Tamang Maoists reported that they lost many ‘good Tamang leaders’ who could have been vital for the advancement of Tamang community. Their aim was to gain rights of the Tamangs and other marginalised groups.

5.4.2. Varied Purposes of Joining the Maoists

Accounts of many informants including T26 and B09 above clearly indicate that the Tamangs joined the Maoists for the purpose of bringing good future. However, in fact, only a few Tamangs held higher leadership positions whereas the Bahun-Chhetris occupied most of the leadership positions. Information about this came from a Tamang informant who had many years of experience in the field of development. During the civil conflict, he lived in his village; observed Maoists’ activities closely; and encountered the Maoists many times. He commented as follows.

The Matawaalis [Janajatis] joined the Maoists because they could enjoy freedom; they got free food; they could travel freely; and the Maoists excused their crimes. The Bahun-Chhetris joined the Maoists for opportunities. They wanted to develop a political career, hold higher positions and command others. You can see in the Maoists those who oppose the Bahun-Chhetris calling them ‘Naak-chuchche’ [those with a long straight nose] are also Bahun-Chhetris (T30, Int, male, 40 years, Tamang, Morang district, 07 April 2009).
In his view the Janajatis joined the Maoists because they were offered something, for example, food and travel expenses. This opportunity should have fulfilled their immediate requirements because most of the Janajatis came from a lower class background or were living in poverty. On the other hand, the Bahun-Chhetris who were comparatively well-off and better educated aimed to develop a political career or business opportunities by joining the Maoists. In doing so they opposed the Bahun-Chhetri leaders of other political parties and employed every effort within the Maoist Party. One of the Bahun-Chhetri informants claimed in regard to leadership, ‘the main reason is their [Tamangs and Dalits] lack of understanding. The Bahun-Chhetris are clever’ (B10, FGD, male, 47 years, Bahun-Chhetri, Kavre district, 21 March 2009). To a certain extent, this informant is accurate. The Bahun-Chhetris were much better educated and they could better understand political culture because they had earlier been promoted by the state whereas the Tamangs and the Dalits had been subordinated in all ways. Since the state was ruled by the Bahun-Chhetris, they trusted other Bahun-Chhetris more than the Tamangs. This psycho-political behaviour, to some extent, seems to have been borrowed within the Maoist leadership. It can be argued that the Bahun-Chhetri-led Maoist Party succeeded in exploiting ethnically segmented and politically excluded groups for the cause of the civil war. At the same time though, it provided an opportunity to the Tamangs and other marginalised groups to participate in the political change process.

5.4.3. Difficulties in Bringing about Desired Change

Even though some Tamangs prospered during the civil conflict, their expectations might not be fulfilled anytime soon in future because the old caste distinctions still prevail. One Tamang Maoist who had worked for the communists since he was a teenager said,

I was a district committee member ... The Bahun-Chhetris are so greedy for posts and property. They use any trick to hold on to power. I have experienced that kind of manipulation. Now I am an advisor at area level [a small unit of governance below a district] ... We overthrew the main enemy, the monarchy, but we have to still work towards a new people’s government. The reactionaries are still active (T31, Int, male, 57 years, Tamang, Morang district, 07 April 2009).
Almost all the informants agreed that the Tamangs did not progress as expected in the post-conflict period given the Maoist Party victory, indicating that the old ethnic and caste divisions still remain strong. The following is an example that shows, as an indigenous group, the Tamangs are not moving ahead to take up new opportunities under the new regime.

The Janajati Tamang women never go ahead and take what’s offered. If some local development programs become available, I call them to go there but they do not go. Then they say the Bahun-Chhetris took everything. Programs are not useful for uneducated people. I am tired of calling for participants and only getting literate people (T32, Int, female, 50 years, Tamang, Morang district, 07 April 2009).

This account implies that Tamang women do not participate in various programs because of their uneducated status. When this frustrated informant tried to mobilise Tamang women, she did not have much success. Instead, she had to take Bahun-Chhetri women into the different programs. She was the chair of a community forestry user group when I interviewed her. Before she took that position, two Bahun-Chhetri women had previously been chairs of that forestry-user group. This woman is an exception in that, as a Tamang, she has moved forward. However, it is also clear that the same status resentments which fuelled support for the civil conflict still remain in Nepal. Members of marginalised groups such as the Tamang seem unwilling to engage with the new opportunities for local development, yet still blame the high caste people for monopolising those opportunities.

Bahun-Chhetri informants also explained lower participation of Tamangs and other marginalised groups in various programs in villages. One informant said,

We brought in a program to improve the Tamang settlement. They are certainly lagging behind. They have not become equal even now … The Tamangs and the Dalits just want to get immediate benefits. The higher caste people think of the future. This is the main difference. Only when others achieve, do the Tamangs and the Dalits know that they have missed opportunities (B10, FGD, male, 47 years, Bahun-Chhetri, Kavre district, 21 March 2009).
It is true that there is a lower participation of Tamangs and Dalits in development programs. However, it is also the case that decision-makers did not implement effective and positive programs to increase the participation of Tamangs, Dalits and other minority groups. In the process of data collection, there was some evidence of how Tamangs and Dalits had been left behind in the development process. In a Tamang village there was an incompletely constructed muddy road. Most of the villagers did not know why the road was incomplete or how the road construction had even been initiated. They guessed that the Bahun-Chhetri political leaders had misused the budget.

On further investigation, a Tamang informant who had graduated from secondary school said the road was left incomplete because the higher caste leaders in the village did not allocate an adequate budget for the road. In the beginning, they did not even allocate any budget. As this informant was close to the village development committee chair, he discovered an unallocated lump sum of Rs 100,000 and demanded this amount from the chair to construct the road in his village. Finally, the chair released the money but it was not adequate to complete the road construction. The villagers were then asked to make a voluntary contribution to the road-building but they did not show much interest because the civil conflict was already in progress.

In the past, instead of providing for the equal rights of every citizen, the state promoted domination by the higher caste and urban elites. The state agencies labelled villagers as ‘backward’ and presented non-Hindu ways of living as ‘opposed to progress’ (Pfaff-Czarnecka 1997). In multi-ethnic Nepal, the state imposed ethnicity-based discrimination by declaring Nepal as a Hindu Kingdom, recognising only Nepali (the language of Bahun-Chhetri) as the official language, depriving ethnic communities of their right to land, and prohibiting ethnic communities from uniting themselves into political communities (Pandey et al 2006). While the state advanced Hinduism and higher caste elites, all other people were considered as subjects and were further victimised by the accusation that they were unable to progress. During the civil war, the ‘backward’ people demonstrated their strength and, in many instances, presented as a real change agent.
5.5. Recognisable Indigenous Identities

In post-conflict Nepal, although it is less than at the expected level, some Tamangs and other marginalised people are moving forward and making new identities for themselves as ‘leaders’ and ‘revolutionaries’. However, they are still suspicious of Bahun-Chhetri motivation and behaviour because they have had many experiences in the past of being deceived and discriminated against. Yet, in a positive way, the civil conflict has raised a kind of awareness among the Tamangs that they need to do something for their own betterment. They need to uplift their status because their social, economic and political conditions are very poor despite their territorial proximity to the national capital (Dahal 2003). The civil war has raised socio-political awareness for an affirmative change among the Tamangs, other indigenous peoples, Dalits and other marginalised groups including women.

Despite increased socio-political awareness, most of the leadership positions from national to village level have been in the hands of the high-caste people. The Tamangs and other indigenous peoples have been observing this exclusionary position for a long time. The following two excerpts demonstrate this situation.

Even now the leadership is in Bahun-Chhetri hands. Tamangs are weapon carriers. The power of the weapons is with the Bahuns. Therefore, the conflict still continues. Yet, today’s weapon carriers can lead tomorrow and they may launch armed civil conflict (T01, Int, male, 48 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 15 March 2009).

As the Tamangs are in high numbers here in Kavre they are demanding a Tamang state. This idea has increased in popularity among them. We understand that … In political parties, the Bahun-Chhetris are certainly ahead. Now even the chair of the Tamsaling is a Bahun (B10, FGD, male, 47 years, Bahun-Chhetri, Kavre district, 21 March 2009).

Both accounts confirm domination of the Bahun-Chhetris in the important positions, which included the chief of the Tamsaling, the proposed ‘Tamang State’. T01 warns that today’s weapon carriers may launch another armed conflict if they do not get a just
share in state power. Such sentiment indicates that indigenous peoples could launch further armed struggle if they feel their rights have not been fulfilled under the new government in post-war Nepal.

It is important to acknowledge that the Tamangs, other indigenous peoples and marginalised groups played significant roles in the Maoist victory. In the decade-long civil war, the Maoists succeeded in their goals because, for the first time in two and a half centuries of modern Nepalese history, the issue of autonomously-managed ethnic areas came to be addressed. After five years of civil war, they announced nine autonomous regions based on the majority of a specific group in a particular area. The regions are listed below (Karki and Seddon 2003, pp 28-29; Yami 2007, p 128):

3. Tharuwan autonomous region: a Tharu populated area in western Terai.
4. Magarat autonomous region: a Magar populated area in Kali Gandaki region.
5. Tamuwan autonomous region: a Gurung populated area in Gandak region.
6. Tamsaling autonomous region: a Tamang populated area surrounding the Kathmandu valley.
7. Newar autonomous region: a Newar populated area in the Kathmandu valley.
8. Kirat autonomous region: a Rai and Limbu populated area in the eastern hills.
9. Madhesh autonomous region: a mixed area of people who speak Awadi or Bhojpuri or Maithali languages in central and eastern Terai.

The first two autonomous regions listed above are highly populated by Bahun-Chhetris with smaller numbers of lower caste people. Regions 3-8 above have majority populations of specific Janajatis. The ninth region is populated by a mixed group of people who speak Awadi or Bhojpuri or Maithali languages. It is interesting to observe that the Maoists did not name the first two regions as Bahun-Chhetri regions, whereas the names of all other autonomous regions clearly indicate which group is in the majority in those regions. This implicitly legitimises the domination of the whole country by the Bahun-Chhetri population who are the majority at the national level. In
practical terms though, the announcement of these autonomous regions was able to attract support for the Maoist insurgency from the different groups of indigenous peoples living in a particular area where they formed the majority. This tactic was successful in mobilising indigenous people against the government, and demonstrates the strength of resentment against Bahun-Chhetri dominance in Nepal. While the civil war was in its top offensive stage in 2002, leadership roles in majority districts were taken by indigenous people, including Tamangs. These roles were very important and often proved decisive at grassroots level. For example, the chairs of 15 of 23 Maoist local governments formed in the Maoist control districts were indigenous people (Gurung 2005, p 146). Success of the Maoist control in local governments was the result of recognition of ethnic identities. The announcement of autonomous regions increased ethnic and regional identities, hence, it advanced the individual’s focus on the group situation rather than on personal deprivation (Sen 2008).

In the beginning of the war indigenous people were not able to assume high leadership positions in the Maoist organisations (Lama-Tamang et al 2003, p 27). Subsequently, their leadership positions have been reduced in the post-war situation. The Maoists re-constituted proposed autonomous regions after the war and named them as 13 states (Pun 2011). When it came to the leaders, nine out of 13 heads of state were from Bahun-Chhetri groups. Four states named under indigenous peoples (Tharuwan, Magarat, Tamuwan, Tamsaling and Limbuwan) were led by the Bahun-Chhetris. Yet, five of the 40-point Maoist demands put forward at the beginning of the civil war directly represented the indigenous peoples’ agenda: ethnic autonomy, devolution, a secular state, ending ethnic oppression and equality of languages (Gurung 2005). By mid-2012, only one of these five demands; a ‘secular state’ had been fulfilled.

Overall, the civil conflict made visible that along with the Bahun-Chhetris the Tamangs and other indigenous peoples are also a source of political power in contemporary Nepal. However, the people’s war was not so much led by marginalised ethnic leaders. In fact it can be argued that the conflict was led by discontented Bahun-Chhetris against ruling Bahun-Chhetris with the support of other minority groups, particularly indigenous peoples and Dalits. This resulted in the segmentation of political power among different ethnic identities. Studies in other countries and in other historical times have shown that the likelihood of armed conflict increases as the centre of power
becomes more ethnically segmented and as significant population cohorts are excluded from power (Wimmer et al 2009). How effectively power sharing among the political power sources progresses in Nepal will decide the future of Nepal and the prosperity of all of its people.

5.6. Conclusion

Discussion in this chapter showed multi-faceted and multi-dimensional tension between religion, caste, ethnicity and class related identities during the Maoist insurrection. During the civil conflict, people from different social divisions or identities interacted violently with each other. These identities in various forms were contested and people from a lower stratum of Nepalese society attempted to gain their rights by opposing different types of discriminations and inequalities. People from lower social divisions expected to uplift their status through the civil conflict and made every effort to take control over local government and resources. Their hope was that their future days would be as good as those in power positions. They are yet to achieve their goal.

Despite a commitment to class struggle, the civil conflict was led by Bahun-Chhetris and people from the upper layers of the social strata. Rather than promoting equity, the Tamangs, other Janajatis and Dalits were mobilised and used as vehicles to pursue the conflict, although they had their own reasons for joining. In the next chapter, impacts of the conflict on basic social services are considered.
Chapter 6. The Impact of the Civil Conflict on Basic Social Services

6.1. Introduction

Previous chapters primarily focused on how people responded to the armed civil conflict. Discussions in those chapters demonstrated that the conflict imposed multidimensional effects on Nepalese people, particularly on rural communities. Most of those effects were negative and challenged rural people’s survival and daily lives. This chapter further examines how the conflict affected rural people’s daily lives.

A number of researchers and organisations have studied the impact of the conflict on Nepal from various perspectives. For example, the World Food Program and Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (WFP and OCHA 2007) assessed the impact in 37 districts. They found that the impact of the conflict was very high or severe in 55 per cent of village development areas while the impact was insignificant in less than 10 per cent of areas. WFP and OCHA (2007) list some of the major impacts of the conflict as: human casualties, orphans and widows of war, and damage to existing infrastructure. Another study reports that the conflict in Nepal destroyed 1,260 village development buildings, 899 police stations, 587 government offices and 116 health posts (Shakya 2009, p 40). According to the National Planning Commission (NPC 2007) the conflict destroyed infrastructure worth at least five billion rupees. Moreover, the government development budget was reduced significantly (Ra and Singh 2005). Only 88 per cent of targeted government spending was realised during the civil conflict (Pradhan 2009, p 3). It seems most development activities were stopped or delayed because of the conflict (Pradhan 2009; Doehne et al 2005; Jha and Vienings 2004; Gersony 2003). Significant negative impacts were as follows: destruction of existing infrastructure, reduction in the development budget, under-expenditure of the allocated budget, and obstruction of development activities. As might be expected, the civil conflict had adverse effects on basic social services. Among these social services were health clinics and medical assistance. Education and schooling were also disrupted. The impact was particularly significant in rural areas.
The findings below echo those of researchers who have looked at the effects of other civil conflicts. For example, reviewing the impact of conflict in 25 war-torn countries, Stewart (2003, p 363) found deteriorating health and educational standards resulted in heavy human costs in most nations. Valente (2011) suggests that countries affected by civil war may bear the cost of war in health and educational terms long after the end of the battle. This is certainly the case in Nepal. Below, the impact of the conflict on the health and wellbeing of Nepalese people is considered, with specific reference to informant accounts. The effects on education are explained later.

6.2. Effects of the Civil Conflict on Health

In regard to health-related quality of life, Babic-Banaszak et al (2002, p 396) endorse the World Health Organization’s definition of health: ‘a state of complete physical, social, and mental wellbeing, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity’. Taking this definition into account, the discussion below looks at informant accounts of the health-related quality of life in Nepal during the civil war. The impact of the conflict on health is presented under three headings: death, disappearance and disability; health services delivery; and social support for health.

6.2.1. Death, Disappearance and Disability

Death, disappearance and disability were the most serious impacts of the conflict. They occurred as a result of brutalities and battles carried out by the Maoists and government forces. One informant who fought for the Maoists in Solukhumbu district said, ‘it is said 39 Maoists were killed but we carried at least 46 corpses’ (T14, Int, male, 27 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 18 March 2009). The Maoists themselves reported that only 15 Maoist combatants were killed in that attack (Yami 2007). Similarly, an authoritative source reported that only two civilians and four security personnel were killed in the Place N1 battle (OHCHR 2005). However, one informant who survived the Place N1 battle said, ‘four ordinary people and one Maoist were also killed’ (T05, FGD, male, 20 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 16 March 2009). In the aftermath, recording the number of actual deaths due to explosion was usually uncertain because the bodies were divided into many pieces. An informant who managed human remnants of an explosion mentioned this difficulty. He said, ‘a cylinder bomb exploded … We collected seven
corpses ... It was quite hard to identify the deceased because bodies had burst into many pieces ... Many corpses could not be identified’ (T01, Int, male, 48 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 15 March 2009). This explosion probably saw a higher number of casualties than the reported number because it took place near a local market where many people were gathered. Examples like this imply that the civil conflict killed many more unarmed people than combatants, and that the number of dead civilians was underreported.

According to the Informal Sector Service Centre (INSEC 2010a), at least 13,236 people were killed during the decade-long civil conflict. The Centre reported that the Bahun-Chhetris were the most affected followed by the Janajatis and the Dalits. Among the total killed, 44.35 per cent were Bahun-Chhetris whereas the share of their population in Nepal is 30.89 per cent. The percentage share of killed persons among Janajatis and Dalits were close to the share of those groups’ population. People from Madheshi and other groups were less affected.

Other data on conflict deaths was provided online by the Emergency Peace Support Project (EPSP) launched by the Government of Nepal after the end of the civil war. INSEC (2010a) data showed a total of 534 conflict deaths in the three study districts but EPSP (2011) showed the number of deaths to be 714. This implies conflict deaths were under-reported. Ethnic distribution of deaths from both sources confirmed that the Tamangs and the Bahun-Chhetris were more affected than other people living in the same territory.

Table 6.1 and figure 6.1 show that percentage of deaths among the Tamangs and the Bahun-Chhetris out-numbered their percentage share in the corresponding population, whereas it was opposite for other Janajatis, Dalits, Madheshis and others. The point to note here is that although the Tamangs are one of the Janajatis, conflict death among the Tamangs was proportionately much higher than it was for other Janajatis.
### Table 6.1: Conflict deaths in the three research districts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Conflict death, INSEC</th>
<th>Conflict death, EPSP</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bahun-Chhetris</td>
<td>211 (39.5)</td>
<td>273 (38.2)</td>
<td>406,850 (29.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamangs</td>
<td>125 (23.4)</td>
<td>162 (22.7)</td>
<td>159,153 (11.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Janajatis</td>
<td>140 (26.2)</td>
<td>187 (26.2)</td>
<td>522,957 (37.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dalits</td>
<td>36 (6.7)</td>
<td>47 (6.6)</td>
<td>149,080 (10.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madheshis and other</td>
<td>22 (4.1)</td>
<td>45 (6.3)</td>
<td>157,331 (11.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>534 (100)</td>
<td>714 (100)</td>
<td>1,395,371 (100)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: a) Figures in the table in parentheses indicate percentages.

b) This table (hence, figure 6.1 below) was developed from population data given in CBS (2008), and conflict death data provided online by INSEC (2010a) at [http://www.insec.org.np/victim/index.php](http://www.insec.org.np/victim/index.php), viewed 02 January 2011; and by EPSP (2011) at [http://www.epsp.gov.np/eng/index.php](http://www.epsp.gov.np/eng/index.php), viewed 06 December 2011.

### Figure 6.1: Comparison of conflict deaths versus population in research districts

Both government troops and Maoists killed both the Tamangs and the Bahun-Chhetris. Numerically, the civil conflict killed more Bahun-Chhetris than Tamangs. Informant narratives clearly suggest that the Maoists targeted political leaders, bureaucrats, businessmen and security personnel. This is the main reason for the increased death frequency among Bahun-Chhetris who highly dominate all these sectors, while Tamang presence in these important sectors is negligible (Gurung 2006, 2005).
Despite the higher death frequency among the Bahun-Chhetris, further analysis from both sources confirmed that in the three research districts, the conflict deaths were proportionately high for Tamangs. Government troops killed Tamangs because they were targeting Maoists. However, the Maoists also targeted and killed Tamang elites in rural villages. This means that the civil war posed a high burden of death for Tamangs as a marginalised group.

Whoever was killed, human killing cannot be accepted for any reason because human life is much more valuable than anything else. The killing not only entails loss of human life but means suffering for the surviving family members. Increased pain and hatred can invite continuous encounters of killing. Moreover, the majority killed during the conflict were identified as unarmed civilians and only 16 per cent as security personnel (INSEC 2007). Information from people who witnessed the battles and explosions suggests that the number of deaths, particularly among non-combatants, was underreported.

Even five years after the conflict ended, the whereabouts of those who disappeared are still largely unknown. Their dependent family members, especially marginalised and lower caste people, did not receive any state sponsored relief packages. One of the districts recently declared that all disappeared people should be recognised as dead so that their families would get the relief package (NMN 2011). Yet, despite the demands from victims’ families and various organisations the government has so far failed to initiate a systematic investigation of missing people. For example, the government was forced to investigate the case of a 15 year girl who disappeared in a government army camp. The girl’s arrest was publicly known and human rights organisations including United Nations agencies advocated the investigation. The remains of the girl indicated that she was tortured, killed and buried in the army premises (OHCHR 2006). Other cases of disappearances are still awaiting proper investigation. Analysing motives, many intimidators seem to have used the conflict as an opportunity to punish enemies or rivals, or to take advantage of women. This is evident from the actions of both the government and the Maoists. Arrested women were tortured, raped and killed. Yami (2007, p 135) claims that the government agencies encouraged ‘rape as a reward’ for their armed forces.
The Tamangs, being poorer than the Bahun-Chhetris and a subaltern group, were forced to remain in the rural areas despite the dangers created by the civil conflict. Because of poverty and lack of connections to urban networks, the Tamangs could not migrate to the district headquarters and cities, for example. The Bahun-Chhetris, on the other hand, were often able to do so. They had access to family and administrative support networks; and could migrate to safer places during the conflict if they had the means and the will to do so. Lacking choices, the Tamangs joined the Maoists or worked for them which often resulted in injury or hardship given their traditionally marginalised position. Analysis of conflict victims in the three research districts revealed that nearly 80 per cent of the conflict victims among Bahun-Chhetris were of low or low-medium socio-economic status while the level was more than 92 per cent among Tamangs (INSEC 2010a). Different studies found that conflict-induced deaths were significantly higher in the poorest areas (INSEC 2010a; Do and Iyer 2007). This suggests that poor people, irrespective of their ethnicity, were victimised more often in the conflict because they could not protect themselves or remove themselves to safer places.

Some anecdotal evidence indicates that the Tamang conflict victims were handled in different ways than the Bahun-Chhetri victims. We may contrast two accounts to illustrate this. First, the sister of a Bahun-Chhetri victim said, ‘my brother got involved in Place G1 event … we took him to Siligudi of India … Both his legs are paralysed … the Party reimbursed my brother’s treatment expenses. Even now the Party is supporting him … He works in Place B5 Party office’ (B21, Int, female, 24 years, Bahun-Chhetri, Morang district, 09 April 2009). Second, a Tamang informant said, ‘the government soldiers punched me and broke my teeth. They fractured my leg … the Maoist Party also spent for my treatment but this knee is not healed up yet’ (T31, Int, male, 57 years, Tamang, Morang district, 07 April 2009). This victim showed his leg to me which was still swollen. He could not balance his posture and had difficulty walking. The significance of comparing these two cases is that the Bahun-Chhetri victim was supported to go abroad for treatment while the Tamang victim just got inadequate treatment locally and no additional support. Further discussion revealed that the Bahun-Chhetri victim retained his district level leadership position while the Tamang victim was downgraded from the district level leadership to a village level position. The
examples illustrate Tamang subordination in the Maoist Party and indicate that health outcomes were worse for marginalised groups.

The risk of being disabled was increased if someone was perceived as a direct or indirect supporter of the Maoists. The government tortured suspects and their family members both physically and mentally. One of the informants who was arrested explained,

The administrators thought I supported the Maoists … They beat me with pipes. They gave me electric shocks … there were more than 150 people in a room. We were standing all the time … After that, I find it difficult to read books. I have burning sensation on my legs and feet … I cannot think logically. My ideas do not flow fluently as they did in the past (B32, FGD, male, 52 years, Bahun-Chhetri, Dhankuta district, 13 April 2009).

B32 said that while he was in jail, the administration deployed security personnel to monitor different activities at his home. The security personnel tortured his family members, restricted their movements and did not allow neighbours or other relatives to visit them. According to him, this affected his son’s health badly. He mentioned that his son had become ‘half-mad’ and could not progress in his study. This account exemplifies the permanent health impairment of Maoist suspects and their family members. The account of the son echoes the findings of Tol et al (2010) on the link between political violence (including torture) and mental health in Nepal. The experience of political violence established ‘diverse impacts ranging from psychological distress to mental disorders’ (Tol et al 2010, p 43), such as we see described above.

6.2.2. Health Service Delivery and Challenges

During the civil conflict, delivery of health services was frequently interrupted because of dangerous situations. Health service providers had to work under continuous risk. In many cases, government security forces accused health staff of supporting the Maoists. For example, a local resident said, ‘government security forces tortured him [a health worker], blaming him for treating the Maoists. Then he transferred to Siraha’ (T17, Int, male, 55 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 19 March 2009). The health staff were
threatened and tortured in their office premises while they were providing health services to people. One of the health staff explained, ‘I was beaten when I was working in a health post in Place M1 in 2002 … the government soldiers … walked into our office and aimed the guns at us. They kicked tables and chairs. Medicines and papers scattered. Mothers and children who had come to seek health services wept’ (B12, Int, male, 35 years, Bahun-Chhetri, Morang district, 06 April 2009). After this event, the staff closed the health post and moved to the district centre, making health services unavailable for rural villagers. Later, the health post staff were transferred to other places. These examples illustrate that health workers were discouraged from performing their tasks diligently. They were not able to provide health services at the optimum level, but instead just carried on their duties to maintain their job while trying to transfer to a safer place.

On the other hand, the Maoists suspected that health workers supported the old regime and put the health workers in danger in various ways. The following account exemplifies various risks posed by the Maoists.

The Maoists took away a stretcher from here [health centre] … I served the Maoists whenever they sought … After attacking Place P1 they had taken a seriously injured patient to Place K2… The patient’s belly had split because of the bullet shot … The Maoists threatened him [a health worker], telling him to either suture the wound or get wounded like the patient … Some health workers were killed (B09, Int, male, 42 years, Bahun-Chhetri, Kavre district, 20 March 2009).

First, the Maoists created difficulties in delivering health services because they took away equipment and medicines from health institutions. Second, health service providers faced risks from the Maoists due to their approaches for treatment. They threatened health workers and took them away to cure their cadres. Third, the risk increased when government security personnel followed the health workers. Many health workers were injured when they were providing health services (see Figure 6.2). Some of them even lost their lives. The Informal Sector Service Centre (INSEC 2010a) records profiles of six doctors who were killed during the conflict. The government restricted medical supplies in the Maoist stronghold areas in an attempt to stop the Maoists using government resources (Ghimire 2009). The Maoists put restrictions on
field staff mobility and objected to the community drug program (Devkota and van Teijlingen 2010). In addition, the Maoists destroyed many health institutions. Nearly a quarter of some 4,000 rural primary health care outlets in Nepal were destroyed during the conflict period (Mukhida 2006). Destruction of the service outlets, and a dangerous working environment reduced delivery of health services in rural areas, where only limited health services were available even during normal situations.

**Figure 6.2: A conflict injured health worker**

This health worker was forced to visit a Maoist hiding place to provide health care. Government soldiers attacked but he managed to survive though he was injured with a bullet shot.

Interruption of health services both by the Maoists and the government in rural areas meant that availability of, and access to, health services to the poor during the conflict worsened. Unavailability of health services in rural villages meant that sick villagers had to stay at home or travel a long distance to seek treatment. A Tamang informant said, ‘when I was sick, my villagers carried me on their back for two days and took me to Kathmandu’ (T17, FGD, male, 55 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 19 March 2009). Availability of health services was limited in the informant’s village during the conflict. Even after the end of the insurgency, the situation did not improve in this village and many other rural villages. It seems probable the rural Tamangs were more affected than the Bahun-Chhetris because the Tamangs were poorer than the Bahun-Chhetris and most of them lived in peripheral areas (Dahal 2003; CBS 2002).

Notably, discussions with informants disclosed that during the conflict, Bahun-Chhetris tended to seek early treatment before their condition became serious while the Tamangs tended to wait and see if they would get better by themselves. The main reasons for
waiting, beyond the conditions of conflict, were: poverty, non-Tamang service providers and lack of knowledge that accessing health services was their right. Once again we can see that the poorest people, especially those from low castes, faced greater challenges to their health.

Deteriorated health services imposed extra expenses on rural families and constrained access to health services. Some patients were forced to visit expensive private doctors and hospitals in urban areas and district headquarters, further weakening their economic situation. The following account shows how expensive and difficult it was to seek health services during the conflict.

I have spent more than a million rupees on my health … the doctor said I had a tumour in my abdomen … they sent me to Place B4 cancer hospital. They declared I did not have any tumour … Later, I got examined by Dr. G K. She removed my uterus … I have faced difficulties many times during the conflict. For example, when I went to Place C1 for my treatment I could not get the public bus from Place I1 to return home … Because of the closure, another time I walked from Place B5 to here [nearly 70 kilometres] (B20, Int, female, 20 years, Bahun-Chhetri, Morang district, 09 April 2009).

This account shows that the woman’s attempt to seek treatment was complicated and worsened by the conflict. She was able to access and afford health services in different places because her husband was working abroad and he sent money to support his family. Unlike this woman from a privileged Bahun-Chhetri background, poor families could not access higher level health services. For example, a Tamang woman who suffered from a swollen knee visited local health institutions but did not get healed. Instead of visiting higher level health services, she consulted a traditional healer. She said,

I went to Neuro Hospital in Place B5 [nearby city] and spent a lot but I was not cured. Later, I consulted a Bombo [a traditional healer] and he healed up me. I had pain in my knee. It was swollen. After the Bombo cured me, the swelling and pain reduced ... He offered an egg and slapped with Sisnu [Nettle] … He removed nettle’s
poison with his Mantra (T27, Int, female, 54 years, Tamang, Morang district, 06 April 2009).

This woman was a government trained community health volunteer. As she knew doctors might cure her problem, she consulted them in the beginning. Because of difficult security situations and a potentially more expensive health service, she opted to consult a traditional healer. Ghimire (2009, p 146) reports that in Rolpa district many people were obliged to rely on traditional healers because of the absence of health workers during the conflict period. Other studies have showed qualified doctors, nurses and trained health workers chose to stay in the cities (Ghimire 2009; Tamang et al 2006; Karkee and Tamang 2002). These examples imply that the civil conflict not only changed health seeking behaviour but might have also caused increased belief in traditional healing, particularly among the Tamangs and other marginalised groups rather than among the Bahun-Chhetris and other privileged groups. Where the modern health care system was not accessible or was ineffective, traditional healing systems kept up people’s hope for life during the conflict period. Yet, increased dependence on traditional healing during the conflict might have resulted in delaying appropriate treatment and patients might have died or sustained chronic illness as an outcome.

The continuous impacts of the conflict were not limited to physical, psychological and mental disorders but extended into family life and social wellbeing. Most of the Tamangs who were working for the Maoists were from rural villages and poor families. They were already in a vulnerable situation and the conflict increased their vulnerability, particularly with regard to women and their children. Some Bahun-Chhetris also worked for the Maoists but they already occupied a more powerful position in rural areas, so although they were very much at risk, their experiences were generally different to the Tamangs. The following two cases exemplify this difference.

Case 1: The Tamang

When I was living in Place S1, I was pregnant ... the landlord sent me to the jungle with ropes and a knife to collect grasses ... they transferred me to Place B2 … I had been pregnant for nearly nine months. One of the women brought me to my home ... I delivered a child. The child died immediately (T24, Int, female, 35 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 20 March 2009).
Case 2: The Bahun-Chhetri

They had come from the [Maoist] Party … I knew my husband was killed … the killing had been four or five days ago … I had given birth to my son one month and 10 days before my husband was killed … I am facing difficulties to educate my children (B25, Int, female, 36 years, Bahun-Chhetri, Morang district, 10 April 2009).

Although both women’s husbands were engaged with the Maoists, the Bahun-Chhetri woman was living at home and accessed maternity care provided by a local health institution. She delivered a healthy baby. The Tamang woman had joined the Maoists accompanying her husband and did not get maternal health care. Her baby died. She had seen wives of senior Bahun-Chhetri Maoist leaders who were taken to hospitals in the capital to seek pregnancy care. After delivering children, they were safely shifted to their homes. This example shows the difference in health service experience between Maoist supporters from a low status Tamang background and those from a high status Bahun-Chhetri background. The Tamang informant above was threefold disadvantaged because she worked at a low rank in the organisation; did not belong to the Bahun-Chhetri caste; and was a woman. A study carried out by a senior Maoist leader shows that 74.56 per cent of Maoist women reported the presence of discrimination in the party organisation (Yami 2007, p 79).

The everyday life of the Tamang woman affected by the conflict was far worse than it was for the Bahun-Chhetri woman. In the example above, the Tamang woman encountered family and social problems because she worked for the Maoists and her baby died. Her husband’s family did not look after her. Listening to a source, she thought her husband was killed and she married another man. The second marriage increased her vulnerability because she lost the love and support of her relatives; her new husband did not have a good source of income; and he was from a lower caste. When interviewed, she was running a tea shop and struggling to survive. The Bahun-Chhetri woman in a similar situation received various supports. For example, her children received free education; she got a job in a pre-school; and a nongovernmental organisation provided some financial support. Her situation was still challenging but she was far better off than the Tamang woman. Neither woman received the dead body of
the husband to perform rituals as prescribed by their culture. This shows that the conflict also affected socio-cultural traditions.

The above case represents a cycle of trauma showing how the gendered social position aggravated by the conflict affected Tamang women’s health and standard of living. This was also true to a lesser extent of Bahun-Chhetri women. A number of studies have shown conflict-induced victimisation of women and children in different countries, contexts and cultures (for example, Bruck and Schindler 2009; Bundervoet et al 2009; McKay 1998; Goldson 1996). However, such studies do not always describe the extent of the victimisation and continuing cycle of misfortune as presented above.

Conflict-related health and social impacts are complex, intertwined and long lasting. In general, the quality of life has much deteriorated. In her focused study on child health in Nepal, Valente (2011) notes the burgeoning micro-econometric evidence of an adverse impact of violent conflict on health and social wellbeing. A timely health service was not available to war victims and rural people, whether they favoured the Maoists or whether they were engaged with the government. The conflict increased risk and difficulty of life not only for those who directly participated in the conflict but also for general civilians, patients and health service providers. Rural people’s health status was downgraded regardless of their actual level of involvement in the conflict and women’s position was weakened.

Curiously, despite much anecdotal evidence to the contrary, a demographic and health survey (MOHP et al 2007) reports that Nepal improved the health status of the population during the conflict period. A comparative analysis shows that 16 out of 19 health indicators to achieve millennium development goals improved despite the armed conflict in Nepal (Devkota and van Teijlingen 2010), including infant mortality rates and measles vaccination. However, for some of these indicators, existing programs may have continued to show expected improvement outcomes over the period. The indicators used in these analyses did not measure the effect of the conflict directly. For example, mental health status and other issues presented above were not included as indicators. In other words, it seems the analysis in those reports did not address health indicators directly related to the civil conflict.
Tol et al (2010) note that research findings on health and political violence in Nepal may be problematic because of the sampling methods used and the diagnostic tools applied. It should be noted that Valente (2011) finds direct evidence that exposure to conflict in Nepal increased probability of miscarriage in early to mid-pregnancy and had an adverse effect on child nutritional status. Elsewhere in a similar conflict situation, Bundervoet et al (2009) found that the Burundi civil war in 1993 had significant negative impacts on the nutritional status of rural populations. These studies demonstrate that health-related quality of life is diminished due to civil conflict. Informant accounts presented in this study confirm that the civil conflict affected people’s health adversely. At a deeper level, conflict-related health and wellbeing impacts were more serious for Tamangs, other Janajatis and marginalised sections of Nepalese communities than they were for wealthier and higher caste people.

6.2.3. Social Support for Health and Wellbeing

Despite the difficulties in health services, rural people got some support from their neighbours. Traditional healers who were mostly untrained in modern health were available in rural areas to provide consultation and treatment through the traditional healing system. Both Tamang and Bahun-Chhetri communities used traditional healers as they charge low fees. One of the Tamang traditional healers said, ‘people do not give me much for my service. Some give five rupees. Others give 10 rupees. I do not ask. It is their wish whether to give or not’ (TH5, Int, male, 74 years, Tamang, Morang district, 24 February 2009). One of the Bahun-Chhetri healers mentioned, ‘doctors get fees, we get nothing. Our work is voluntary’ (TH3, Int, male, 75 years, Bahun-Chhetri, Morang district, 24 February 2009). These accounts demonstrate that in rural areas traditional healer services were available for negligible cost. People perceived their service as a social service because they have a tradition of supporting their neighbours. Traditional healers and female health volunteers were the key actors for delivering social support for health and wellbeing in rural areas during the conflict period.

Other villagers also supported patients in various ways to maintain and improve their health. As mentioned earlier, one was able to survive because of his neighbours’ support. He said, ‘my villagers took me to a hospital in the city’ (T21, Int, male, 61 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 19 March 2009). He was suspected of suffering from
tuberculosis and returned home thinking that his disease was not curable and he would die. Considering the ongoing civil conflict and his health situation, he wanted to celebrate his last days with his family and relatives. However, he received further social support which resulted in his recovery from the disease.

One day, a Bahun Person D1 came and told me, ‘older Brother-in-law, you will not die ... Go to hospital again’. I had already finished all the money I had ... I spent around 150,000 rupees ... He said to my nephew that he would contribute some money and my nephew should also contribute ... Because of his help, I was again carried to Bir Hospital ... They also could not cure me and referred me to Kalimati Hospital. I spent 15 days there. I took injections for two months and medicines for eight months. I recovered well from tuberculosis (T21, Int, male, 61 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 19 March 2009).

We can observe in this narrative that a Bahun-Chhetri helped a Tamang by offering financial assistance. Because of this moral and financial support, the informant was cured. This support was possible because of the historical co-existence of the Tamangs and the Bahun-Chhetris in the neighbourhood. Although this kind of support for the Tamangs by the Bahun-Chhetris was rare, it did save lives during the civil conflict.

The Maoists also benefitted from the Nepalese tradition of providing social support and welcoming guests. One of the Tamang informants said, ‘the Maoists came, stayed and dined as they liked. We provided everything for them’ (T38, Int, female, 62 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 17 March 2009). T38 perceived that supporting the guests was a punya karma [a holy work]. In addition, because of security reasons and reduced health service delivery in rural areas, the Maoists sought villagers’ support for their health care. They used civilian houses as their temporary hospitals, requiring householders to provide a kind of social service. Regarding this, one informant said, ‘I gave two rooms to the Maoists ... One time they came with a patient whose abdomen was burst with gunshot. They stayed here for seven days. In the evening there used to be 22 to 23 Maoists’ (B20, Int, female, 20 years, Bahun-Chhetri, Morang district, 09 April 2009). This account shows that the woman provided shelter to the injured Maoists. Although the woman and her children were in danger, she allowed the Maoists to stay in her home. She explained that she did this because she had learned from her mother and
mother-in-law to welcome guests. She would have treated the government soldiers in the same way. For her, it was a sacred duty, a tradition of supporting people in need.

It has been well established that the Maoists used civilian houses as their hospitals. They brought health workers there to cure injured soldiers and other Maoists (DHSP 2003). They regularly transferred patients from one to another houses at night. According to informants, the family members of the house were always in terror of being attacked and killed by government forces for harbouring the Maoists. The act of transferring patients to different houses made the villagers frightened.

During the conflict period it is clear that social support provided an important contribution to the health and wellbeing of both the Maoists and community members. Devkota and van Teijlingen (2010) claim that social support systems contributed to improved health indicators in Nepal during the conflict. Government trained female health volunteers played an important role in maintaining minimum modern health care for rural people. Each volunteer roughly covered 150 households, to give polio drops, distribute condoms, deliver family planning information and administer minor first aid (Logan 2005). Wilkinson and Marmot (2003) argue that social support can improve patient recovery rates. Pedersen (2002) notes that loss of family and social support networks enforce health risks that may increase mortality and morbidity in populations. In an attempt to improve their health and wellbeing, individuals and families in the Nepalese conflict sought social support from their relatives, friends and neighbours whom they could trust. In their historical study Suedfeld et al (1997) found that Holocaust survivors had sought social support from fellow sufferers who were considered trustworthy. It indicates that during difficult security situations social support tends to be accepted only from trustworthy sources.

In summary, despite the provision of traditional social support for health and wellbeing, people’s right to live a long and healthy life was diminished by the civil conflict. The war has had long term consequences on people’s health in Nepal. The rural poor, particularly the Tamangs, have suffered because access to health services was restricted. It became both unaffordable and unavailable for them due to the security risks and increased costs. At the same time though, there was a high level of social support that assisted survival rates.
6.3. Effects of the Civil Conflict on Education

This section analyses the impact of the civil conflict on education using comments of significance from the research participants. It addresses the management of schools, the teaching-learning process and student performance. Informant accounts show that availability, accessibility and affordability of quality education for the rural population was reduced.

6.3.1. Management of Schools Obstructed

The Maoists were ideologically committed to the re-education of the population so they intervened directly in schools and attempted to keep the school management under their control. The Maoists were effectively influential over the school management committees. One informant who was the secretary of a school management committee said, ‘for every program we had to get permission from the Maoists’ (T02, Int, male, 39 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 16 March 2009). Another informant said, ‘I was the chair of a primary school management committee for the last 14 years … the Maoists visited and demanded money’ (B14, Int, male, 72 years, Bahun-Chhetri, Morang district, 08 April 2009). The Maoists carried arms and used threats when negotiating with school management, teachers and students. They called teachers out from classrooms to make their demands, for example,

I was taking class. The Maoists called me ... I walked upstairs which was our office room ... Two new people were talking and I took a seat. Then I saw two pistols on the table. I was surprised and scared ... they talked and checked administrative files ... they asked us to bring children into their programs ... I also had to take responsibility for taking children to their programs and returning them safely from there (B03, Int, male, 35 years, Bahun-Chhetri, Kavre district, 14 March 2009).

This informant took students to the Maoist programs many times and brought them back. He mentioned that government security helicopters were sometimes flying above them. They had to take precautions so that the helicopters would not attack. A few
times, other teachers took a turn. The teachers were at risk because of both the Maoists and the government soldiers. Their roles became deeply politicised as both the Maoists and the government soldiers sought support in classrooms (Davies 2010). Vaux et al (2006) notes that the Maoists formed parallel school management committees to oversee the official committees in public schools in some districts. No-one reported the existence of such committees in the districts selected for this study. Overall, the Maoists were oppressive towards teachers and school management whereas the government soldiers were interrogative and intimidating. Their actions hampered the development of a conducive educational environment in rural areas.

By controlling school management the Maoists gained at least three major advantages. The first advantage of intervening in schools was the use of school premises and the mobilisation of teachers and students for various activities of the insurgency. As described above, the Maoists asked teachers to mobilise students for their various protests. They pressured teachers to close schools frequently to increase attendance at different protests. For example, one of the teachers said, ‘the Maoists ... forced us to shut down our school for a few days’ (B02, Int, male, 70 years, Bahun-Chhetri, Kavre district, 13 March 2009). Such incidents happened suddenly. Watchlist (2005) reported that the Maoists forced schools all over Nepal to close without notice for two weeks in June 2004. If any school was not closed for the required period, they vandalised buildings and threatened teachers in the schools.

The closure of schools affected children’s education. For example, an informant reported, ‘the Maoists closed the boarding school where my younger son used to study. My son was quite disturbed ... He roamed around as his school was closed’ (T01, Int, male, 48 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 15 March 2009). It indicates that the young boy’s education was impeded by his experiences of the conflict. The informant was educated and was a part of the better-off rural middle class so he was able to transfer his son to a private school in the district headquarters. He also got support from people to educate his son because he was one of the political leaders. Such privilege was not available to most parents who sent their children to private schools in rural areas.

School closures certainly meant lost days of learning for pupils, once again impacting adversely on their schooling outcomes. Interaction with informants indicated that lost school days affected the Tamang pupils more than the Bahun-Chhetri children because
the Tamang children usually did not study at home. Uneducated Tamang parents lacked the ability to guide their children to concentrate on study. Because of dire poverty and ignorance, they expected their children to do household chores so that they could work for subsistence income. For them, work was more important than education whereas the Bahun-Chhetris understood well that the education was more important. Similarly, lost school days affected girls more than the boys because the girls usually performed household chores while their brothers studied or played. The girls were perceived as destined to become the ‘property of others’ because they have to go to their husband’s home after marriage.

The second advantage for the Maoists of intervening in schools was to gain control over village elites because most of the members of the school management committee were village leaders, social workers and other educated people. Two informants who were the chairs of school management committees spent many days hiding in different places to avoid direct contact with the Maoists. However, they could not escape forever and paid large donations. They did not actively oppose the Maoists and continued to live in their villages. Both the chairs were from the Bahun-Chhetri group. They explained that they were targeted because of their engagement with schools. Later, they were removed from the post. No-one reported that any Tamang suffered because of their association with the school management. The background of the village elites did not bother the Maoists as long as they fulfilled what the Maoists demanded. The village elites had to support the Maoists or at least not oppose them. Those who did not support them migrated to other places (Williams 2009). This situation discouraged the elites from participating in school activities which resulted in weak and inactive school management. While this might not have impacted so directly on pupils, it added to the climate of fear in schools.

The third advantage was direct access to school resources, confirming one of the major sources of income to finance the civil war. For example, one of the government schools received funding to improve school infrastructure but the Maoists demanded five per cent tax from the fund. The member who dealt with the Maoists said, ‘Donor 1 had provided Rs 500,000 to improve the school’s infrastructure. The Maoists tried to stop the program ... we negotiated for Rs 20,000’ (T02, Int, male, 39 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 16 March 2009). If the Maoists did not get money, they stopped the
development and other activities. In schools, the teachers who received a monthly salary were one of the major targets and were forced to donate regularly, for example,

I donated Rs 10,000 ... We were scared because we received letters two times from them ... The letters said, ‘you do not have to donate your salary that is for your work. You should give us the salary from four Saturdays in every month because on these days you stay at home’ (B04, Int, male, 38 years, Bahun-Chhetri, Kavre district, 14 March 2009).

The teacher donated a part of his salary under pressure. Vaux et al (2006) mention that the Maoists collected substantial amounts from the management of private schools and imposed a five to 25 per cent tax on teachers. As this example shows, rural teachers were under considerable pressure. They worked in a climate of fear; and many donated salary to the Maoists. They were often absent when hiding from the Maoists. Ethnically, male Bahun-Chhetri teachers were more affected because they were in the majority. In the study districts, half of the conflict victims among teachers were Bahun-Chhetris. No death of a Tamang teacher was recorded. INSEC (2010a) reported that teachers occupied 1.1 per cent of the total conflict-induced deaths. Discussions with informants suggest that Maoist intervention in school management and pressure on teachers affected student learning adversely by reducing funds for school programs and demotivating teachers due to fear and economic loss.

In many rural areas, the Maoists banned private schools, arguing that they were for the rich people. They explained that private schools charged higher fees and most rural people could not send their children to study there. Vaux et al (2006) confirm that the Maoists closed private schools across the country. During the conflict nearly 700 private schools were closed (Singh et al 2006). Most of the students in private schools were Bahun-Chhetri children while only a few Tamangs like T01 above had sent their children there. The ban on private schools forced them either to join public schools or to drop out. The reduced number of schools meant that classrooms became overcrowded in the schools that were allowed to continue functioning. The undesirable number of students in classrooms would have contributed to a diminished teaching and learning experience and outcomes.
6.3.2. The Teaching-Learning Process Hindered

There were yet other ways in which teaching and learning processes were severely hindered in schools. Both the Maoists and government security forces closely observed schools and intervened directly if they had any suspicions. They even monitored activities in the same classroom at different times, ‘at that time government soldiers personnel waited outside. One used to enter the classroom … The Maoists also used to enter the room directly and used to stay inside the classroom’ (T03, Int, male, 27 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 16 March 2009). Moreover, the Maoists lobbied for change in the existing education system. One informant said, ‘the Maoists told us they would publish a book and we had to teach from that book’ (B04, Int, male, 38 years, Bahun-Chhetri, Kavre district, 14 March 2009). Despite the announcement, this did not happen in the districts where fieldwork was conducted.

However, according to Vaux et al (2006), a Maoist curriculum for military training was published. Caddell (2006) notes that the Maoists piloted model schools to implement their new curriculum in Rukum, Rolpa and Salyan districts. Such intervention in education was not to substitute for ordinary education (Vaux et al 2006) but aimed to develop students as a reserve force for mass uprising (Caddell 2007). Obviously this new set of demands impacted upon ordinary teaching and learning activities. Tamang children were discouraged from going to school on the grounds that the current schooling system offered a bourgeois education. They believed more in the Maoist interpretation than the Bahun-Chhetri students did. Some were convinced by the Maoist claims and joined them because they expected that their status would be uplifted. However, in terms of long term outcomes they missed classes and lost learning opportunities to acquire an educational qualification which was essential for prosperity in their adult lives.

Hindrance in teaching and learning was also experienced because of travel risks. Travelling to and from school was dangerous in two ways. Firstly, government personnel carried out sudden security operations if they suspected the presence of the Maoists. Security personnel behaved rudely and tortured individuals if they were suspected in any way. One of the student informants said, ‘it was frightening to go
outside during the civil conflict … the Maoists used to come … on the way to school, the government soldiers used to threaten us … They ordered us not to walk in groups’ (T04, Int, female, 20 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 16 March 2009). Difficulties on the way to schools affected rural Tamang students more than it did rural Bahun-Chhetri students because schools were usually located far from where the Tamangs lived.

Secondly, the Maoists attacked government security personnel whenever they got an opportunity. Sometimes students and teachers were trapped in the cross-fire. The following account from a school teacher exemplifies this situation.

I was trapped in a battle in Place N1 when I was going home [from school] … The Maoists stopped the bus and turned it towards a stream … After a while, a battle between the Maoists and the government soldiers began. Bullets hit the house where I was hiding. Fortunately, they did not come inside (T02, Int, male, 39 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 16 March 2009).

The teacher was lucky not to be killed because the armed conflict killed more than 160 teachers (Vaux et al 2006) and 344 students (INSEC 2007). Nelson (2008) argues that the actual number of such victims is not available but it has been reported subjectively and sporadically. Although T02 was not physically wounded, he did not return to school for several days due to mental distress. At that time, he was working as a temporary teacher. He indicated that if he were in a permanent post he would have stayed at home for more days. This means that the conflict was evidently justification for teacher absenteeism.

The narratives of students and teachers confirm that the teaching and learning process was interrupted because of the difficulties in travelling. In addition, a series of strikes and blockades reduced the number of school days (Singh et al 2006). The teaching and learning process further deteriorated with the displacement of more than 3,000 teachers (Vaux et al 2006). Schools in rural areas suffered greatly from vacant teacher posts during the conflict.
Teachers and students were frequently abducted, arrested and tortured. For example, one informant school teacher was arrested and tortured by the government soldiers on suspicion of supporting the Maoists. The teacher said,

Government soldiers abused me. They used coarse language and called me a bastard ... they beat me in my head, face and body. They kicked with their boots. I fainted ... I became unhealthy for two months. I got severe chest pain … I was mentally sick (B22, Int, male, 40 years, Bahun-Chhetri, Morang district, 09 April 2009).

This account shows that the teacher’s ability to perform his duty worsened because of the arrest and torture. In fact, many teachers were not supporters of the Maoists but were used and abused by the Maoists. The Maoists dined in their kitchens, slept in their beds and threatened them that they should transfer their children from private schools to public schools. At that time, B22’s three children were studying in grade six, five and three. Because of the Maoist pressure he withdrew his children from good schools. Although his children’s study was affected adversely, he was able to manage his children’s education appropriately himself. Likewise, a few elite families were able to send their children to study abroad (Nelson 2008).

In contrast, many poor rural families did not have this capacity and their children’s education was seriously compromised. Rural illiterate and poor families, such as the Tamangs, were less concerned about their children’s education in school. They only knew there were dangers on the way to school and in school. They were scared that their children would get injured, killed, arrested or abducted so they kept them at home. The Maoists used children and even recruited them as soldiers for the insurgency while the government soldiers suspected and beat them. Many Tamangs stopped their children going to school during the civil conflict. This only increased the likelihood of adult poverty.

6.3.3. Students’ Performance Altered

In rural areas, the civil conflict affected almost every rural student’s learning and altered their performance (Figure 6.3).
Nepalese children are compelled to help their parents in household and farm-field activities. Despite the difficult situation, a Tamang boy (left picture) had continued in a public school while a Bahun-Chhetri boy (right picture) had migrated to a safer place to attend a private school.

Informants who were parents observed that students’ performance in exams was impaired because of the civil conflict. The following two accounts from informants of different ethnicities both demonstrate this.

**Case 1: The Tamangs**

My SLC (school leaving certificate) test could have been better, if there was no civil conflict. Once I failed in the test. I passed in the next year with 51 per cent marks (T04, Int, female, 20 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 16 March 2009).

**Case 2: The Bahun-Chhetris**

My son was undertaking the SLC exam at the time. We felt that he faced some difficulty because of the conflict ... he achieved just 76 per cent (B01, Int, male, 42 years, Bahun-Chhetri, Kavre district, 13 March 2009).

Although these are only two cases we can see that the Tamang student who studied in a public school was affected more and her achievement was significantly lower than for the private school Bahun-Chhetri boy. The conflict forced the girl to drop out of school for two years in grade seven while the boy had to change three schools. The girl said to me, ‘people used to say, Maoists came and took away girls and boys … my grandfather ... stopped me going to school’ (T04, Int, female, 20 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 16 March 2009). Then the girl started *Thanka* painting (a traditional painting based on the
Buddhism) and earned some money. However, after two years her mother convinced her to go to school again. The examination success of the girl even during the conflict suggests that poor rural girls’ education can be improved if mothers play assertive roles.

In contrast to the girl mentioned above many students dropped out of schools permanently. One of the teachers reported, ‘I think 10 to 12 students dropped out my school ... The main problem was that the Maoists used to take the students to their programs frequently’ (B03, Int, male, 35 years, Bahun-Chhetri, Kavre district, 14 March 2009). Another teacher said, ‘as far as I know four to five students joined the Maoists’ (T02, Int, male, 39 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 16 March 2009). The main reason for the conflict-induced dropout was frequent Maoist teaching in the schools and a number of incidents in which the Maoists took students away to their protest programs. The Maoist teaching opposed the existing education system and demanded a revolutionary education system. Although none of my informants was clear about what a revolutionary education would mean, the Maoists were able to recruit students using this ideology. A dropout student who had become a village level Maoist leader said, ‘I had gone to my home village at that time ... I met Person L1 and other friends. They talked about our roles in the revolution ... I was impressed by them’ (T26, Int, male, 22 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 28 March 2009). This informant joined the Maoists while studying grade 10 in the capital. Young educated people like T26 were the main targets in schools so that they could be disciplined into the beliefs and practices of the movement. Caddell (2006) points out that schools were an important recruiting ground for the Maoist movement. As a result, the dropout rates increased with student age and study grade (MOHP et al 2007). This implies that the civil conflict impacted on older students more than the younger ones.

Once again though, official reports of educational outcomes during the civil conflict offer a very different picture to what has been described above. It has been claimed that Nepal was able to reduce overall school dropout rates and increase enrolment rates during the period of intense conflict (MOHP et al 2007; CBS 2002). However, the negative impact of the conflict was reflected in school performance and the final exams. For example, in 2005, only 29 per cent students of 171,440 government schools passed the SLC exam whereas it was 80 per cent for the students of 44,863 private schools (Caddell 2006). Most of the private schools were operating in urban areas and it was the
opposite in the case of public schools. The conflict was intensive in rural areas which impacted negatively on the performance of students in those areas. Other studies also shed doubt upon the official claims. Lai and Thyne (2007) analysed the impact of civil war on education using UNESCO global education data. They found that in general, civil war decreases enrolment rates by 1.6 to 3.2 per cent. It may well be that improvement in school enrolment in Nepal during the period of the conflict reflected a previously established growth trend. In other words, if there had been no civil conflict, Nepal might have improved its educational indicators even more.

Although the civil conflict impacted formal education adversely, other forms of learning took place. For example, Maoist rhetoric contributed to increased socio-political awareness among rural people. By the end, even illiterate Tamangs were able to explain the concepts of proletariat, bourgeois and feudalist. When talking about schools and students, they often advocated ‘people’s education’. Although they were not clear about the concept, they realised that education was essential to progress in any work sector. One Tamang informant who worked for the Maoists said,

I did not study, but I will send my grand-children to school. People’s education is not possible without bourgeois education. Both people’s education and bourgeois education should go together (T08, Int, male, 41 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 16 March 2009).

By participating in the conflict, this informant learnt the importance of the education system. Another informant mentioned, ‘the Maoists had to capture power centres by raising people’s awareness and determining their level of understanding’ (B09, Int, male, 42 years, Bahun-Chhetri, Kavre district, 20 March 2009). The Maoists taught the general public, particularly the Tamangs and other subaltern groups, about different concepts including: inclusion and exclusion, indigenous and non-indigenous, oppressor and being oppressed, poor and rich, equal and unequal, and so on (Yami 2007; Karki and Seddon 2003). These kinds of double-edged explanations of social issues were able to influence rural people to understand differences and identify their own positions, which is a form of learning.
6.4. Effect of the Civil Conflict on Other Services

The civil conflict impacted on other social services negatively. During the conflict, most of these services were stopped in the rural areas. Many services had not resumed even by 2009. One informant said, for example, ‘the elderly allowance has not been distributed here [rural village in Kavre] yet’ (B05, Int, female, 35 years, Bahun-Chhetri, Kavre district, 14 March 2009). These kinds of services were stopped for both Tamangs and Bahun-Chhetris in rural areas. Moreover, many people sometimes did not receive allowances because of administrative errors. Such errors usually occurred for the Tamangs because of language, representation and other difficulties which were the consequences of oppressive governments over many decades. Nevertheless, regardless of the disadvantages experienced by Tamangs, rural people in most places did not get basic services because village government officers who are responsible for delivering services locally were displaced. It is reported that the civil conflict displaced 68 per cent of the secretaries nationwide and damaged nearly 50 per cent of village government buildings (WFP and OCHA 2007). The secretaries were expected to allocate budget for local development projects, including the distribution of a monthly allowance to the elderly, widows, disabled and other helpless people; and carrying out administrative tasks such as registration of births and deaths (Shrestha and Dahal 2007; Gersony 2003). The absence of secretaries in rural areas during the conflict meant that inadequate records were kept regarding services provided by the state. A great deal of detailed information about general service provision in rural areas is missing.

Similarly, the conflict negatively impacted on many local development initiatives. For example, a Tamang informant who left a water project incomplete said, ‘in 1999 ... I had to return to my village to co-ordinate a drinking water project worth Rs 1,000,000. I became the secretary of the ward committee for the Maoists’ (T12, FGD, male, 45 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 17 March 2009). Because of the increased conflict, the project was not finished as planned. Development organisations that implemented water and sanitation projects were even attacked during the conflict. The following account shows that the Maoists destroyed the office of a non-government organisation that implemented community development projects.
We conducted development projects in seven villages … The main program focused on improved farming … We also conducted a drinking water supply project. Our office was set on fire during the conflict period … The Maoists set fire to the office … Later, I learnt that they had threatened some of our friends … They abused us that we were mobilised by the Americans (T30, Int, male, 40 years, Tamang, Morang district, 07 April 2009).

Bahun-Chhetri informants also mentioned this, for example: ‘development activities were stopped and social services were interrupted’ (B33, FGD, male, 60 years, Bahun-Chhetri, Dhankuta district, 16 April 2009).

Gersony (2003) confirms that the Maoists prevented repair of roads and drinking water systems, refused to allow new development projects and expelled or pressured many non-government development organisations. Based on an assessment of 14 districts in Nepal, Jha and Vienings (2004) reported that the government consistently provided no services other than health and education in rural areas during the conflict. The provision of other services was certainly greatly reduced. For example, in 2005/06 only 53.9 per cent of the budget for drinking water and sanitation was realised (GON and UNICEF 2010). Under-expenditure of the budget was a reflection of abandoned or incomplete projects (Figure 6.4).

Figure 6.4: Drinking water supply

In most rural areas, poor Nepalese people, including Tamang girls and women, have to travel hours to fetch drinking water. A few installed drinking water taps supply water only in the morning and evening. A tap (left picture) in a Tamang village has stopped supplying water since the conflict time. Another tap (right picture) in a Bahun-Chhetri village maintained water supply.
However, once again government reports contradict grass-roots accounts to show that access to safe drinking water increased significantly during the conflict period (Das and Hatlebakk 2009; MOHP et al 2007). Access to safe drinking water was considered to be satisfied if people could access drinking water from piped water or a deep tube well or a covered well, without verifying the adequacy of supply and the quality of drinking water. Das and Hatlebakk (2009) analysed national reports and found that, between 1995/96 and 2003/04, access to safe drinking water increased by 8.8 per cent of households at national level. Eighty per cent of Bahun-Chhetri households and 65.7 per cent of Tamang households had access to drinking water. Another survey showed 19.8 per cent of rural households were using improved latrines while it was 36.9 per cent among urban households (MOHP et al 2007). The same survey reported that households without latrines reduced from 70 per cent in 2001 to 50 per cent in 2006. These figures clearly show wide discrepancy between the Tamangs and the Bahun-Chhetris; and between rural and urban households.

As Valente (2011) notes such reports support the Maoist commitment to their stated policy of avoiding disruption of people’s services. However, higher intensity of the conflict in rural areas, higher participation of the Tamangs and other subaltern groups in the conflict, and interruption of the development projects in rural areas suggest that the progress seen in the overall report figures might have been heavily influenced by the projects that were implemented in the district headquarters, cities and other easy-access places. The claimed progress is also contrary to government development expenditures, for example, such expenditures were only six per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP) in 2004, down from nine per cent in 2001 (Ra and Singh 2005, p 1). Detailed analysis of data segregated in various categories may show the adverse impact of the conflict on the water and sanitation services. In addition, issues of quality and quantity were not addressed in the existing reports.
6.5. Conclusion

The armed conflict in Nepal impacted adversely on basic social services, particularly in rural areas, by interrupting availability of, and access to, health services, education, and improvement and maintenance of infrastructure. The poor and the subaltern groups like the Tamangs were more affected during the conflict period. As the conflict posed increased risk, social service providers and other service staff who were deployed in rural areas either moved to safer places or performed minimal duties. As a result, delivery of health and other social services during the conflict deteriorated resulting in further suffering of the rural poor. Abduction or arrest on suspicion and torture for an uncommitted crime was a misfortune for many rural people, especially for those who were poor. At the very least, there were negative health and wellbeing outcomes.

In regard to education it seems ironic that the ideology of the Maoists in Nepal identified schools as sites of revolutionary learning that would emancipate the lowest sectors of society. In fact, the activities of Maoist troops in rural schools tended to worsen teaching and learning outcomes for the children of the poorest people, at least in the short term. On the other hand, government troops, acting for the state, did little to protect schools and pupil learning.

In conclusion, deteriorated basic social services strengthened rather than diminished the poverty cycle for rural people, even though macro-level reports indicate higher achievements in the indicators for basic social services. Information available at the macro-level does not necessarily represent the impacts of the conflict at the micro-level, in areas of particular vulnerability, hence, it should be considered very cautiously. The next chapter will discuss the impact of the conflict on livelihood opportunities.
Chapter 7. The Impact of the Civil Conflict on Livelihoods

7.1. Introduction

This chapter considers the impact of the civil conflict on the livelihoods of Nepalese people in the three selected districts. Here the term 'livelihood' is understood as 'a means of securing the necessities of life'. This was a challenge given the circumstances of the civil conflict. Some informants even said that talking about livelihoods during the conflict was meaningless because they were always thinking about whether they would live or die at that time. Yet, despite the risk of being killed, most rural people maintained their livelihoods and survived.

Generally, studies of livelihood in Nepal are mainly focused on food, farming and forests (for example, Adhikari and Adhikari 2010; Bhandari and Grant 2007; Paolisso et al 2002; Seddon and Hussein 2002). Among these studies, Seddon and Hussein (2002) have attempted to cover a wider range of practices and list some of the important impacts of the Nepalese conflict on livelihoods. They mention: undermined food security through blocking the movement of food, reduced livelihood opportunities due to restrictions on the movement of persons, depleted household labour and increased vulnerability due to migration under duress, requisitioning and theft of food supplies, increased food prices and a general slow-down in economic activity, thus reducing non-farm employment opportunities (Seddon and Hussein 2002, p 21). Another study lists the livelihood areas most affected by the conflict as: reduction in development work; assets confiscation by rebels and security forces; and decrease in income from construction wage labour, agricultural farming, vegetable sales, agricultural wage labour and non-timber forest products (WFP and OCHA 2007, p 17). These studies demonstrate that the civil conflict impacted on diversified livelihoods, not just on food, farming and forests. However, these studies do not show how the conflict may have impacted differently on indigenous and non-indigenous peoples. This chapter sheds light on this gap using the narratives of the Tamangs and the Bahun-Chhetris.
It has been established that livelihood comprises capabilities, assets (natural, physical, human, financial, social and political) and activities required for a means of living (Bhandari and Grant 2007; Korf 2004; DFID 2001; Scoones 1998; Chambers and Conway 1991). These elements are interlinked and include both economic and non-economic attributes of survival (Ellis 2000). The economic attributes result in an income whereas the non-economic attributes include policies, vulnerability context, social relationships and institutions that contribute to survival. Both economic and non-economic attributes play vital roles for the survival of rural people, particularly during a civil conflict. Rural people use assets for strategies and activities to achieve livelihood outcomes based on their priorities and the choices available to them. This relationship forms a livelihood system (Figure 7.1).

Figure 7.1: Livelihoods framework

Note: This figure was adopted from Ashley 2000, p 14; Korf 2004, p 277.

This concept of a livelihood relationship is used to analyse the impact of the conflict on livelihoods during the conflict. In developing countries, livelihood diversification is common in rural areas (Bhandari and Grant 2007; Hussein and Nelson 1998) and this applies to Nepal. The diversification is determined by a number of factors. Ellis (2000, p 292-298) lists seasonality, risk strategies, labour markets, credit markets, asset strategies and coping behaviour as six important determinants of livelihood diversification, which is a feature of sustainable living in developing countries. This chapter identifies how livelihood diversification was important during the conflict period.
7.2. Implications for Concurrent Livelihoods

The main visible sources of income for livelihoods in the rural villages where fieldwork was conducted were: subsistence farming and livestock raising, small business entrepreneurship, and local employment. The latter two were usually combined with the first. Farming was the main means of survival. The civil conflict critically affected the combination and diversification of rural livelihoods, demanding adjustment to various difficult situations.

7.2.1. Loss of Business and Other Assets

The civil conflict forced rural people to alter their livelihoods when facing unrecoverable losses. The following two stories are examples of rural families that had to adjust their livelihoods when they lost income from non-farm sources.

Case 1: The Tamangs
My younger brother and his family ... look after my house and farms ... about one hour walking distance up the hill from here ... I used to trade medicinal plants ... I have not done it for the last five years. The Maoists asked me for 15 per cent tax. I offered them five per cent but they did not agree. I started a nursery then lost 200,000 rupees ... now I have no income source. I am facing difficulties in educating my children (T01, Int, male, 48 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 15 March 2009).

Case 2: The Bahun-Chhetris
Maoists took away one third of production from our field. We could not give the portion to the landlord. He ... gave the land to another farmer ... We migrated from ... Terhathum [to Morang] district ... My husband’s sister and her family live here ... We sold products that we grew in our fields. We saved money and bought some land here ... We have taken some loans to buy this land ... We had a retail shop in the hills for a few years. We were also growing cattle and farming ... If the conflict had not happened, we could have continued our shop (B17, Int, female, 35 years, Bahun-Chhetri, Morang district, 08 April 2009).
Despite their ethnic differences, the two families represent the rural middle class in normal times. Each family had some farmland, a few cattle and a business enterprise as their means of survival. In Nepal, the top 60 per cent of rural people have reasonably secure and diverse livelihoods in normal times (Seddon and Hussein 2002). Because of the conflict, both families lost a small business which was an important source of income. In addition, the Bahun-Chhetri family lost the harvesting land owned by another landlord. These accounts support the claim that key capital assets were lost during the conflict (Justino 2009; Bhandari and Grant 2007), and challenge the claim that diversification into non-farm income can result in risk reduction (Ellis 2000). Yet, despite the loss of two assets, the Bahun-Chhetri family still seems to be in a better position than the Tamang family. The Bahun-Chhetri family is high caste so there were other assets and other forms of capital available to them. Using their extended family relationship (social capital), they bought other productive land and migrated to a comparatively safer place, from the hills to the plain area. In contrast, the Tamang family started a new local business to grow and sell young trees and other plants that ended up in an unrecoverable loss. It implies that, having more diversified livelihood resources, the Bahun-Chhetris showed a higher capability to cope with the difficult situation during the conflict while the Tamangs lacked such capability due to less diversified resources and a lack of social capital through which to acquire new resources.

Available resources and skills can help a family to choose alternative livelihoods during difficult times. As mentioned above, the Bahun-Chhetri family had adequate resources and bought other productive land using their social network. B17 said that her son was living with her relatives during the conflict period so that he could study in a good school. Her son’s schooling (building human capital) was another factor that compelled her to move to the new place. The actions taken here resemble the asset-securing strategies explained by Ellis (2000). Such strategies did not work well for the Tamang family because of inadequate assets. The Tamang family used some assets to start a new livelihood enterprise but failed to sustain it because of ongoing security problems. Informal conversation revealed that the Tamang informant also negotiated with the Maoists to run a restaurant by providing storage space for Maoist goods and equipments. However, income from the restaurant was not sufficient to maintain his family needs. Later, T01 supplied timber to urban businessmen illegally by paying
money to government security personnel at different checkpoints on the way to the capital, which was also a very risky enterprise.

As these two examples show, the conflict changed the livelihoods of rural families. We can see that the conflict forced rural people to attempt new diversified livelihoods and apply multiple entrepreneurial strategies, even getting involved in illegal activities. The example of the Bahun-Chhetri family shows that people who have sufficient assets can choose secure and sustainable livelihoods. The Tamang example shows that people who generally do not have enough assets tend to choose insecure and short-term enterprises, putting their daily lives and livelihoods in danger.

Arrests, abductions and torture by government security personnel impacted on people’s livelihoods immediately and in the long run. Such intimidating actions forced many people to close their business enterprises. For example, one informant said, ‘when I had a hotel in Place B6, the Maoists came and ate at my hotel … The government army … took me into custody and tortured me … I could not continue my business and returned home’ (T06, Int, male, 45 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 16 March 2009). According to Ellis (2000, p 297) such a response is coping behaviour relevant to livelihood. This livelihood coping behaviour was not the sole survival strategy for the informant. It cost a great deal to be released from government custody and to get treatment for injuries sustained during torture. T06 raised some money by selling his cattle and other goods. His wife’s parents helped him. He also borrowed from local money lenders. We can see from this case that the impact of the conflict on people’s livelihoods was very complex. It sometimes required multiple strategies to survive livelihood failure.

The complex difficulties posed to people’s livelihoods were reduced if they had access to social and political capital. T06 may not have been tortured and may not have had to close his business permanently if someone very influential had acted for him.

One Bahun-Chhetri informant said that she was not tortured physically due to her acquaintance with the government security personnel. She said, ‘the government army … arrested me … they did not torture me physically … He [a police inspector] helped me by keeping me in his office. I have known him when he was a sub-inspector. My home is in Place B1. His wife’s paternal home was also there’ (B21, Int, female, 24 years,
Bahun-Chhetri, Morang district, 09 Aril 2009). The Bahun-Chhetris who dominate central government, administration, security and local government (Gurung 2006; Dahal 2005) seemed to have been treated better when they were arrested by government forces due to their status. Korf (2004) reported that, in the civil war context in Sri Lanka, Sinhalese civilians often benefited economically while minority Tamil civilians were deprived of opportunities. Anecdotal evidence indicates that the negative impact of the conflict on livelihoods of the Bahun-Chhetris was generally less severe than it was for the Tamangs.

7.2.2. Reduction in Farm Yield

Conflict-induced difficulties resulted in reduced farm production. Many farmers, like B17 mentioned above, lost their land or faced reduction in yield. The farmers left the land uncultivated or they cultivated with low investment. The Maoists also took control of commercial farms (for example, tea gardens, cardamom farming, broom grass and ginger growing in Ilam and Panchthar districts) compelling farmers to leave the areas (Upreti 2010a). Firstly, this resulted in a decrease in commercial farm yield. Secondly, poor families lost income because they could no longer provide agricultural waged labour. The conflict affected the livelihoods of all farmers but it affected the daily lives of the rural poor more seriously by decreasing agricultural labour markets and reducing tenant farming.

Despite the conflict-induced difficulties, some rural farmers from high castes took strategic action to increase the future livelihood capabilities of their families. For example, one of the informants invited the Maoists to dine at his home so that they would perceive him as their supporter; he sold a part of his land; and sent his son to a good school in the district headquarters. Yet, these actions had immediate short term negative consequences for his family. He faced reduction in his farm yield, making it just enough to feed his family while he used to sell some rice in the past. He said, ‘I have about 10 ropanis [0.52 hectare] of farm land ... I sold one and a half ropanis for my son’s education’ (B01, Int, male, 42 years, Bahun-Chhetri, Kavre district, 13 March 2009). Because of the conflict, some better-off rural farmers sold their land to send their children to study in good schools in the district headquarters, urban areas and even abroad (Nelson 2008). None of the Tamang informants reported that they sold their land
to educate their children. Instead, Tamang children dropped out of school when their parents attempted to overcome the difficult situation created by the conflict. For example, one informant said, ‘my son ... dropped out at grade nine ... The Maoists came frequently in my home with guns. My child was mentally tortured and he could not study. When I was displaced to Place B5, he had to change his school. That also contributed to make him drop out of the school’ (T28, Int, male, 45 years, Tamang, Morang district, 07 April 2009). This informant was capable of investing for his son’s education as the above-mentioned Bahun-Chhetri informant had, but he did not. He said one of the reasons that the Tamangs did not invest in education was lack of awareness. The saying among the Tamangs was still prominent: ‘what will you do with studying and learning? You will have food if you do ploughing’. This statement implies that the Tamangs preferred agricultural activities that provided immediate subsistence for them.

Comparison of livelihood strategies between Tamangs and Bahun-Chhetris indicates that the marginalised group tended to be further marginalised during the conflict by relying on agriculture. On the other hand, despite potential risks, the advantaged group invested in human capital to enhance future livelihoods, as well as diversifying their enterprises. Any attempt to secure livelihoods in times of difficulty is a risk strategy. In diversifying, a farmer tries to ensure that risks are spread to diminish loss of total income (Ellis 2000). B01 spread risks by feeding the Maoists and sending his son to a safer place, hence, possibly securing his livelihood for the future.

When T28 was displaced, he left his younger sister and his mother at home who cultivated his land but with reduced farm yield. He also lost income from his rice/flour mill due to his displacement. Many families left women and children at home while men joined the Maoists or migrated to safer places. This put an extra burden of household chores and other responsibilities on rural women. Participation in the Maoist insurgency meant a decreased labour force to cultivate farm land. One informant whose son was killed said, ‘we have 10 kaththa [0.338 hectares] land ... We do not harvest. I have given it to someone on contract’ (B18, Int, female, 66 years, Bahun-Chhetri, Morang district, 09 April 2009). The informant could not cultivate her land because of the absence of male members. As a result, her income from the land was reduced. It implies that the civil conflict reduced farm yield and other income for rural families because of the decreased male labour force.
7.2.3. Contrasting Use of Capabilities

During the conflict, some Tamangs abandoned their homes to join the Maoists. Many stories were told by informants about this. At other times, a key member of the family was killed and other members of the family were compelled to join the Maoists for their survival. Low socio-economic status was the main reason behind this. It was found in the interviews that in general, only one member of a Bahun-Chhetri family would join the Maoists while other members maintained livelihoods using available resources. There was an opposite trend for most of the Tamangs. This finding implies that during difficult times poor families struggle to use their capabilities to enhance their livelihoods but socio-economically better-off families can exercise their capabilities - potential or otherwise - to secure future livelihoods.

While joining the Maoists worked for some, for others it did not. Several informants who joined up said they lost their opportunities to gain income. For example, an informant said,

I am from a marginalised group ... We are at the bottom of the socio-economic class. Here the rich always oppress the poor ... I worked for the Maoist Party ... I contributed eight years labour. If I had not worked for the Party, I could have worked to increase my income. I can do either carpentry or masonry ... We did not get any salary (T08, Int, male, 41 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 16 March 2009).

It is important to note that T08 claimed he could have done much better for his family’s welfare if he had not worked for the Maoists. His account illustrates that sometimes joining the Maoists meant poor people were worse off; they could not apply their capabilities to gain a salary and improve their socio-economic status. Despite this, the informant indicated he was happy because he contributed to change that might improve his livelihood opportunities in the long run.

Many other rural families, however, could not find a way to improve their socio-economic status, whether they participated in the conflict directly or indirectly. Poverty is a dominant rural phenomenon in Nepal (Nelson 2008), and the conflict exacerbated
the marginal economic existence of the poorest people. The poverty impact was
heaviest with regard to income level, educational attainment and access to social
services among marginalised groups, including the Tamangs (DFID and World Bank
2006), who are strongly represented among the informants for this study.

7.2.4. Employment Challenged

Rural people found difficulties in accessing and maintaining employment as a
consequence of civil conflict. The war affected farm yields and agricultural wage
labour. Different types of employment, whether daily waged or salaried, were directly
affected. Teachers, health workers, civil servants, transportation workers, labourers and
other workers experienced difficulties in carrying out their duties and keeping their jobs
and income. It was usually the Maoists who challenged job-holder performance and
demanded part of their wages. If employees did not follow Maoist commands, their
lives were at risk. On the other hand, government security personnel might suspect them
of collusion with the Maoists and torture them accordingly. The job-holders needed to
apply multiple strategies to maintain their employment, income and safety during the
conflict.

We may take the example of school teachers. It was generally observed in rural areas
that teachers were more affected by the conflict than other types of employees. Teachers
were a real focus for revolutionary intervention. They lived there together in the
community with the people; they were educated and had the potential to influence both
people and government; and they were guiding young students who could be Maoist
recruits. Because of this important position in rural areas, the teachers had to apply risk
strategies and asset strategies so that their jobs were maintained and potential danger
was minimised. They attended to their duties more often and worked harder because the
Maoists were monitoring their activities and performance. The change was clearly
visible. Community people generally perceived that, because of the conflict, teachers
became more regular in their hours and performed better than before (Vaux et al 2006).
The teachers spoken to agreed with this view.

However, sometimes this strategy was not sufficient to safeguard their jobs. As
discussed previously, the government soldiers arrested and tortured school teachers. On
the other hand, the Maoists always demanded teachers’ support for the insurgency. If they found anyone not supporting them, they punished that person so that other people would conform. A common punishment was physical torture and warning, but it ranged from detention to death. For example, ‘the Maoists kept a teacher in Shramkaid [detention] for three years ... They took away his salary. Only Rs 8,000 to Rs 10,000 per year was left for his survival’ (B03, Int, male, 35 years, Bahun-Chhetri, Kavre district, 14 March 2009). They accused the teacher of not informing them that he had seen government soldiers who attacked the Maoists and made significant casualties. The teacher had come from another district. He could not get transferred during the detention period. He had to work hard but only a little wage was left for his subsistence. It meant that maintaining certain kinds of employment during the conflict, particularly in rural areas, was complicated and dangerous.

Although the above-mentioned teacher could not move to another district, many other salaried job-holders from rural areas either moved themselves, or took their family to a safer place. For example, an informant who was a government soldier said, ‘my home is in Bhojpur [district] ... [I] could not go to our home. That’s why I brought my family here in Place D1 ... easily accessible place for me. During the holidays, I could come by bus easily’ (T36, Int, male, 43 years, Tamang, Dhankuta district, 17 April 2009). The informant’s family was threatened that he should quit his job and support the Maoists. The migration of his family reduced the potential risk of being abducted, tortured and killed. He could continue his job; his wife established a retail shop in the new place; and their children attended a comparatively good school. This demonstrates that the Tamangs can also migrate and diversify their livelihoods if they have assets at their disposal. Conflict-induced migration is an asset-preservation strategy (see Ellis 2000). It reduces the local risk and allows the possibility of finding new livelihoods at the destination.

7.3. Maoist Fundraising and its Consequences for Livelihoods

As the Maoists needed lots of resources to take care of their workers and to buy arms, they demanded donations of money and materials from almost every household in rural villages. The donation amount was decided roughly based on the land ownership and other income sources, on the discretion of the Maoists who were fighting in a particular
geographical area. Therefore, the amount of donation varied from place to place. The Maoists usually sent demand letters if they asked for large donations (Figure 7.2). The rural households who paid the Maoists generally did not know the basis for fixing the donation amount.

Figure 7.2a: Maoist fundraising

A Maoist demand order in a letter pad (right picture) which reads: To support the people’s war launched by our Party we have demanded Rs 50,000. Please hand over the amount to merchant Person S1. We do not have to remind you what your situation would be if you do not respond to the Party order.

A Maoist money receipt (picture below) reads: Today, date 1998/04/03, we received Rs 50,000 from Person N2. We will not come to collect again.

Figure 7.2b: Maoist fundraising

The Maoists demanded ransom donations even from the elderly people. The Bahun-Chhetri man (left picture) managed to hide and did not donate while the Tamang man (right picture) donated a large amount to the Maoists to save his life. He borrowed from a local lender.
7.3.1. Sources of Income Reduced

It seems that local Maoists demanded donations by assessing sources of household income. For example, in the case below, the informant received a demand letter. Then some Maoists came and requested him to fulfil the demand because he had enough property and his son was working for the government. The Maoists warned him to provide the money at the next visit, fired guns in the sky and threatened to kill him if he did not. An excerpt from the informant’s interview is presented below.

The Maoists came and they took Rs 50,000 ... They threatened me ... That happened to me because of enemies in my village ... My son gave me Rs 13,000. He is in the government service. I managed the remaining amount. I sold rice, grains and cattle. I sold two milk giving buffalos for Rs 30,000 ... I had to do it for my life. Otherwise they could have killed me ... I did not report it [to the police]. The security forces could have come but I could not depend on them (T23, Int, male, 80 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 20 March 2009).

T23 managed the demanded amount by selling two of his three milk-giving buffalos, by requesting his job-holder son to contribute and by selling grains. He used a livelihood coping strategy (Ellis 2000) to reduce the risk of being killed, but lost his assets. He stopped producing an excess; farmed his lands just for himself; and raised just one milk-giving buffalo. In fact, he could not recover the loss.

In contrast, in a similar case, a high caste informant managed the Maoist demand without losing his capital assets. He donated Rs 100,000 in two instalments, ‘first, I gave them Rs 40,000. Next time I gave them Rs 60,000’ (B14, Int, male, 72 years, Bahun-Chhetri, Morang district, 08 April 2009). Above, T23 expresses a high degree of unhappiness with the forced donation saying he could not trust government security forces and he suspected enmity with his neighbours. In contrast, B14 was more relaxed about it, even though he also was not happy with the donation. In-depth discussion revealed that B14 was able to maintain his livelihood using his socio-political networks. For example, he used a police vehicle personally in the times of a transportation strike. In other words, the civil conflict imposed difficulties in the livelihoods of both the
Tamangs and the Bahun-Chhetris but the livelihood resilience was higher for the Bahun-Chhetris because of their readier access to socio-political networks.

In general, Bahun-Chhetris are richer than the Tamangs in the fieldwork areas. Despite this fact, informant accounts suggest that the Tamangs donated more than the Bahun-Chhetris. It seems that the Maoist-led conflict forced the Tamangs to donate more. For example, the Maoists demanded four out of 56 Tamang informants to pay large sums of money while it was only for two out of 59 Bahun-Chhetri informants. Because of the proximity to each other, villagers knew who were targeted and who paid large amounts. Three Tamang informants and one Bahun-Chhetri informant paid as per the Maoist demands. It was reported that another Tamang also paid a large sum, but he was not available for an interview. Some people even borrowed from local moneylenders to fulfil Maoist demands so that they might survive potential dangers. In rural Nepal, villagers traditionally borrow money from local elites with an interest rate of two to five per cent per month (Gersony 2003). With a few exceptions, almost all rural villagers donated some money or worked for the Maoists, diminishing their own means of living.

7.3.2. Money Lending and Borrowing Disrupted

The Maoist insurgents frequently targeted moneylenders. They used arms and took away money and material assets. An informant described one such action.

In this area the first action against a feudalist named Person D2 was taken in Place M3. People used to take loans from him and he used to charge high interest. In addition, he demanded labour services. Therefore, his properties were captured; fake documents were torn up and ordinary people’s land certificates were returned (T08, Int, male, 41 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 16 March 2009).

The action mentioned by T08 was a kind of revenge carried out against the lender who had a history of exploiting the borrowers. Another informant also said, ‘Person D2 had collected his money dues using the police force if somebody did not repay a loan’ (T16, FGD, male, 50 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 18 March 2009). The Maoists targeted local elite moneylenders, like Person D2, because poor borrowers were not happy with the moneylenders. Many elite lenders had taken away a borrower’s land by deceitful
means as the poor farmers had taken loans or borrowed food grains on the guarantee of their land ownership certificates (Upreti 2010a; Das and Hatlebakk 2009). Therefore, elite lenders were reported to the Maoists as a form of punishment by those who felt persecuted in matters of loan repayment practices. It seems that in selected cases the insurgency became a tool to protect poor farmers’ assets that enhanced their livelihoods.

However, not everyone agreed with such retributions since poor people had nowhere else to go for a loan, for example,

The Maoists punished that man [Person D2]. Eventually who was affected? The simple and poor Tamangs could not get loans anymore. The poor cannot go to Banepa [a city] to take loans from a bank (T16, FGD, male, 50 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 18 March 2009).

Although a few Tamangs felt relief temporarily, with an expectation of liberation to come, the Maoist attack on local Tamang elites greatly reduced Tamang social capital when it came to money loans. It impacted on poor farmers’ livelihoods by increasing the difficulty of borrowing money locally and gaining other support for their daily lives. The attack on the money-lenders did not end the historical money lending-borrowing system. For example, to pay the Maoists a large sum, one Tamang informant borrowed money from another non-Tamang elite lender at an interest rate of two per cent per month. Another Tamang who was convinced to work for the Maoists, later borrowed money at five per cent per month and went abroad. The moneylender was from another caste, not a Tamang. Informant accounts indicate that dispute on money lending and borrowing was more intra-ethnic than inter-ethnic. The problem was more common within Tamangs than between Tamangs and Bahun-Chhetris. Hence, some Tamangs attacked other Tamangs who were perceived as the oppressors. Due to the conflict, many poor villagers experienced difficulty in getting loans locally. As a result, they could not buy fertiliser in time resulting in decreased production of grains from their limited lands. It means that, because the Maoists attacked the village elites without developing an appropriate alternative, the poor were negatively affected, creating difficulties in their livelihoods.
Another tactic to take money away from the villagers was a Maoist loan scheme. Gersony (2003) reported that the Maoists had an internal loan program for their own active members at 18 per cent annually or 1.5 per cent per month, a slightly lower rate than it was from the traditional lenders. In addition, Gersony (2003) notes that in a western district the Maoists established a rural cooperative bank that provided loans to the poor at 15 per cent a year, including a five per cent contribution to the Party. Both initiatives taken by the Maoists were short-term strategies to maintain good relationships with the villagers and fund their insurgency regularly.

7.3.3. Food Stock Decreased

Civil conflict affects the lives of the poor by reducing their food stock. It is evident from the Nepalese experience that the Maoists did not just demand donations of money. The following accounts show this.

**Case 1: The Tamangs**
The Maoists came and asked me to prepare a meal for them. I said I did not have flour. I told them that if they wanted, they could eat the roasted maize that was available. They did not want to eat the roasted maize ... I went to my neighbour and borrowed two *Paathi* [nearly nine kilograms] of flour ... I counted those who ate at my house. There were 16 people (T10, Int, male, 72 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 17 March 2009).

**Case 2: The Bahun-Chhetris**
Around 25 to 30 people came and stayed here … They divided into groups of six to seven persons and spread to stay in our neighbours’ homes ... We cooked for them (B06, Int, female, 64 years, Bahun-Chhetri, Kavre district, 14 March 2009).

T10 needed to borrow from his neighbours to feed the 16 Maoists but B06 managed it with her own stock because there were fewer guests. The Maoists entered villages and forced many families to provide them with food and shelter although the families had limited food supplies (Watchlist 2005). Meeting such demands put a great strain on the capacity of poor rural people to maintain their livelihoods.
In addition, informants mentioned that the Maoists collected food stuffs (for example, rice and potatoes) when the villagers harvested their farm products. Gersony (2003) reported that, in their control areas in the western Nepal, the Maoists imposed a new form of tax in which each family was required to donate 20 to 40 kilograms of grain annually. In Nepal more than 60 per cent of families commonly experience some degree of food insufficiency (Upreti 2010a) which is much worse in rural areas, particularly among the Tamangs. Most Tamang families produce only enough food grain to feed the family for three to six months a year. Lack of sufficient food stuff is evident in T10’s complaint that he had to borrow from his neighbour to feed the Maoists. The Tamangs were affected more than the Bahun-Chhetris as they produced less food grain.

Furthermore, the burden was higher on the Tamangs because they had to host the Maoists more frequently as they live in greater numbers in remote rural areas. Providing food and shelter to the Maoists was an unavoidable burden. It can be perceived as a risk-management strategy (see Ellis 2000) because this action reduced further unexpected loss of assets. Moreover, if they had not provided food and shelter, they might have been tortured. The provision of food and shelter under the implied threat of torture had a complex negative impact on rural livelihoods.

A study of 25 war-torn countries shows that food consumption was reduced and availability of calories per head was worsened in the most conflict affected areas (Stewart 2003). In Nepal people encountered not only reduction in availability of local food, but difficulty in accessing non-local food supplies because of frequent blockades. Both the government security forces and the Maoists were engaged in such acts. Watchlist (2005) reported that blockades severely hampered food supply in western Nepal particularly in Rolpa, Achham and Doti districts. In combination, decreased food stock at home and lack of supply of non-local food stuffs would have reduced daily food consumption in rural areas. Valente (2011) established that the civil conflict had an adverse effect on child nutritional status in Nepal, and this would also hold true for the adult population.
With a few exceptions, the livelihoods of wealthier people in rural areas were not affected as much as those of the poor. Many informants mentioned that the privileged escaped from paying large donations by diverting public funds to the Maoists. Most privileged people in rural areas held responsible positions in government agencies and other development projects. Because of this status, they could channel public funds to the Maoists and gain exemption from paying at the household level. For example, one informant who was the chief of the village government did not pay the Maoists from his private income. He said, ‘I did not have to donate even one rupee ... They asked for five per cent from the village fund. I gave it to them’ (B10, Int, male, 47 years, Bahun-Chhetri, Kavre district, 21 March 2009). This implies that the government itself was funding the Maoists indirectly. This kind of indirect funding from government revenue protected the livelihoods of well-off families in rural areas, while poor and low caste families had to pay using their own minimal assets.

However, it was reported that, unlike the Bahun-Chhetris, the Tamangs who held responsible public positions paid the Maoists from their private incomes. For example, the following informant whose husband had completed at least three terms as the chair of a village government paid the Maoists himself.

He [husband] was the chair for the road construction committee ... The Maoists demanded money from the chair. He asked the contractors to contribute for donating to the Maoists but they did not agree. Then my husband had to give his own. He borrowed a loan from a bank and gave Rs 300,000 to the Maoists. This year he repaid the loan to the Bank ... We hoped they would not kill my husband (T38, FGD, female, 62 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 17 March 2009).

To protect his life, the informant’s spouse used a risk-management strategy (see Ellis 2000) and paid a lump sum to the Maoists, even borrowing money from a bank in the city as he could not manage total amount locally. He repaid the bank loan three years after the end of the formal civil conflict. None of the Bahun-Chhetri was reported in this situation. Because of weak access to central governance, rural Tamang elites were
obliged to negotiate with the Maoists locally to save their lives rather than seeking support indirectly from the government.

Pyakuryal and Uprety (2005) estimate that the Nepalese national economy lost more than one billion US Dollars as the casualties, displacements and detention increased during the war. On the other hand, development spending was reduced by 20 per cent due to the civil conflict (Pradhan 2009). As described above, a certain share of local government money dedicated to development projects at local level was diverted to fund the Maoist insurgency. Upreti (2010a) argues that diversion of state funds from the basic services sector seriously impacted on the livelihoods of the poor. The impacts of the conflict on individual and household livelihoods affected the national economy due to reduced purchasing power. For the most part, wealthier people, particularly the high castes, maintained their livelihoods either by exploiting their positions to access local funds or by compensating their loss from the central government funds.

7.4. Gaining New Opportunities

Although the conflict imposed difficulties on rural livelihoods, it also generated some new opportunities. For example, some rural people got new jobs; those who joined the Maoists did not have to pay off loans; a few individuals gained assets; and selected entrepreneurs diversified their livelihoods. Below, it is argued that the impacts of the conflict should also be analysed from a positive perspective even though the negative effects are readily observable.

7.4.1. New Employment Created

In rare cases, the Maoists helped to create new employment opportunities by allowing local people to fundraise at a local level. For example, the following informant said his school recruited teachers by tapping into a local source during the conflict period (Figure 7.3).

During the civil conflict our school … used to collect Rs 100 from vehicles by blocking the road. Though that was not a legal act, we did it with permission from
the Maoists. We recruited three teachers with that money (T02, Int, male, 39 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 16 March 2009).

The informant mentioned that such teachers continued to work at the school even after the conflict ended. Vaux et al (2006) noted that such teachers in Nepal got paid very low wages, as little as 25 per cent of the normal government employee rate. Despite the low pay, teachers recruited in this way donated an amount to the Maoists and used the remaining amount to fulfil their family needs. This was a great opportunity for some educated people in rural areas so that they could start their career and at the same time could continue their farming and other family business.

Figure 7.3: Concrete production site

One of the local sources which contributed to fund wages for local teachers.

Importantly, the civil conflict opened many job opportunities in government military posts due to increased military effort to suppress the Maoist uprising. By 2005, the government had increased the number of soldiers by threefold from its pre-conflict capacity of 35,000 (Pradhan 2009). Moreover, from 2003 the government recruited women combatants, perhaps learning from the Maoists. Overall, increased defence spending resulted in an increased military force. In a similar context, Korf (2004) reported that the Sri Lankan government employed many young men to serve as home-guards which provided lucrative income for Sinhalese families. In the Nepalese conflict, the defence sector consumed a significant share of the budget and thus provided a livelihood opportunity for many who wished to serve the government, with benefits for their families.
7.4.2. Loans Exempted from Repayment

It seems that the civil conflict sometimes meant exemption from paying back loans for rural villagers, whether the loans were made through the traditional money-lending system or less commonly through the modern banking system. However, there were conflicting opinions. Informants who were closer to the Maoists such as T08 claimed that the Maoists took action against ‘feudalists’ to free the farmers from false loans. According to them, such actions freed innocent farmers from discriminatory loan bondage. Other informants who did not support the Maoists said ‘bad guys’ became Maoists and punished their moneylenders so that they would not have to repay. Other informants observed that some villagers who had taken loans from local lenders did not have to pay back their loans after joining the Maoists. One informant said, ‘if someone who owes money joins the Maoists, no-one dares to ask him to pay the money. Such people work in the name of the Maoists but take benefits privately’ (T07, Int, male, 21 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 16 March 2009). Another informant who gave Rs 10,000 to his neighbour for six months did not dare to ask for his money back even after six years. The agreement letter that was signed by the borrower was sighted. It seems the borrower had become a Maoist and so did not pay back the money. This evidence indicates that some villagers who joined Maoists gave loan exemptions to themselves. On the banking side, the ideal of bank-loan exemption persuaded frontline Maoists to attack banks, loot money and destroy records. Yet, the destruction of official documents often impacted on poor villagers adversely. The following narrative shows this.

When my youngest son was going abroad, we had taken a loan of Rs 150,000 from local lenders. We had kept that money in the bank because of fear of theft or loss. The Maoists exploded a bomb in the bank. We suffered. My son could not go to abroad for a year. We hardly got the money from the bank after one year. We had to pay high interest to the lenders for a year unnecessarily. The interest rate was five per cent per month (T33, Int, male, 75 years, Tamang, Dhankuta district, 11 April 2009).

This account shows how the attack at the bank and destruction of documents affected a poor Tamang family. Usually, the Tamangs did not use bank loans because of the lack of collateral and administrative problems created by dominant high caste employees.
Instead, they borrowed from private moneylenders and if it was a big loan, like T33’s above, they deposited it in a bank account for safety reasons. None of the Bahun-Chhetris reported this kind of bank transaction and subsequent problem.

Some Bahun-Chhetris reported that they were exempted from loans because in 2008 the government announced a loan exemption scheme of up to Rs 30,000. For example, an informant reported, ‘I had a loan of Rs 50,000 from agricultural bank. I paid Rs 20,000 and the rest was exempted. Both principal and interest were free for Rs 30,000’ (B28, Int, male, 45 years, Bahun-Chhetri, Dhankuta district, 11 April 2009). None of the Tamang informants reported that they benefited from this scheme, probably due to lack of credit status and bank loan liability. It suggests that, if there was any conflict-induced credit gain, it gave benefits to the privileged groups rather than the marginalised ones.

Targeting banks resulted in an unavailability of loans in rural areas when people needed them. This problem was exacerbated as the Maoists even destroyed farmers’ documents when they faced disagreements with local people. For example, ‘the Maoists had come with the Laalpurjaa [land ownership certificates] ... from Place M2 Bank. They were loan borrowers’ Laalpurjaa. They tore them up after they quarrelled with us’ (T05, FGD, male, 20 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 16 March 2009). In addition, the Maoists advised rural people not to repay government loans (Gersony 2003), which resulted in further unavailability of loans. Because of the credit market failure (see Ellis 2000), many rural people’s livelihoods were challenged.

7.4.3. Assets Gained

In some cases, dispossessed villagers were able to get their properties back during the conflict which had been taken away by other people. For instance, one of the villagers became a local Maoist leader and took back his land that had been taken away by his uncle. His uncle said, ‘during the conflict they wanted back their land that they had sold to me. One of my nephews was the chief of the Maoist village government. He broke my hands and legs’ (T19, Int, male, 60 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 19 March 2009). After more than 20 years, the nephew wanted the land back by paying the loan amount to his uncle. The uncle did not agree to part with the land because the current cost was at least Rs 300,000. The nephew was not in a position to pay the current price. He
tortured his uncle using sharp weapons. Scars were visible on the informant’s body. Another villager who had witnessed the incident confirmed the brutality done by the nephew. Later, the nephew received half of the land that had been taken away in the past, using the Maoist insurgency as an opportunity to settle an old score and gain an asset to enhance his livelihood. A few Tamangs but none of the Bahun-Chhetris reported such gain.

In fact some Bahun-Chhetris were displaced because they did not agree with the Maoists. For example, one of the informants said, ‘they [the Maoists] captured Person A1’s lands for two years ... He was a Pradhanpancha [village chief during the Panchayat rule]’ (B30, Int, female, 36 years, Bahun-Chhetri, Dhankuta district, 11 April 2009). The ex-chief opposed the Maoists so they tortured him; captured his land, house and other properties; and forced him to be displaced. After the conflict ended, he was able to sell his properties to his neighbours, probably Bahun-Chhetris. It means that sometimes the conflict provided an opportunity for moderately privileged groups to gain assets from highly privileged ones, which was nearly impossible in normal times.

The capture of lands and other properties during the conflict is an opportunity for some individuals to enhance their livelihoods, maybe temporarily. It was a source of income particularly for the Maoists (ICG 2010; INSEC 2010b; Manandhar and Neupane 2010). For example, ‘the Maoists in Bhojpur district depended on the produce of land they captured during the conflict and in Dang district, they rented out captured land against a proportion of the harvest’ (ICG 2010, p 10). It is reported that in the southern plains, the Maoists captured and distributed lands to Maoist cadres (INSEC 2010b). In Justino’s (2009, p 9) words, ‘this is something worth fighting for ... benefit from violence through looting and redistribution of assets during conflict’. It seems that such acts benefited the poor. However, it has made the poor subjugated to the Maoist Party, a change of landlord with some freedom, yet not a complete liberation.

7.4.4. Income Sources Diversified

Due to the conflict, some entrepreneurial workers managed to grab new work opportunities. For example, the following high caste informant took a long holiday and went abroad.
I went to Malaysia. I worked for an electronic company ... The conflict situation pushed me to go there ... We paid the Maoists one day salary every month. If we did not pay our life was in danger. They also asked for additional donations frequently in the names of their various programs ... Either I had to join them or I had to leave my village. I thought leaving the village was the better option. Then I went abroad and earned some money (B31, Int, male, 40 years, Bahun-Chhetri, Dhankuta district, 12 April 2009).

By going abroad, this informant gained additional income and also retained his job at the school. His wife said he had to go away for their family’s welfare. She mentioned, ‘the Maoists had captured our village. Our house was like theirs. When we returned from work and jungle, they had already entered our house, cooked and eaten … as if that was their own property’ (B30, Int, female, 36 years, Bahun-Chhetri, Dhankuta district, 11 April 2009). B31 returned to Nepal after three years and his family migrated to a place near to the district centre. They bought some land where they grew vegetables and sold them for cash income. As this action enhanced their livelihood, it serves as a good example of an asset strategy (Ellis 2000) facilitated by the conflict. Furthermore, the informant’s neighbours back in the village cropped his land and he eventually returned to his school. The Maoists did not capture his lands because he did not oppose them. This case supports the claim that migration can improve one’s financial means, skills, social network and other livelihood strategies (Thieme and Wyss 2005). A few informants reported that some police officers also went abroad on leave and retained their jobs. However, none of the Tamangs in this study gained the privilege of such livelihood diversification.

Different agencies influence livelihood strategies and determinants by implementing government policies and programs. During the decade-long conflict in Nepal, many agencies that support rural livelihoods were destroyed or impeded. For example, 57 agricultural service centres and nearly 50 per cent of village government buildings were destroyed in 37 priority districts (WFP and OCHA 2007). Shakya (2009) reported that the conflict in Nepal destroyed 114 agriculture-livestock service centres and 98 forest range posts. On the assistance side, development organisations had to either negotiate a
deal with the Maoists or move to a safer area (Jha and Vienings 2004). These facts imply that the civil conflict impacted negatively on rural livelihoods.

Overall, the Maoist-led Nepalese civil conflict had a more negative than positive effect on people’s income and livelihoods. This finding resonates with some other studies in countries where similar situations prevailed. For example, Ibanez and Moya (2006) argue that civil conflict usually makes it impossible to use skills because networks are destroyed. In Rwanda, Bruck and Schindler (2009) note that genocide widows experienced severe constraints in earning livelihoods. In Nepal the civil war saw many of these same negative impacts on livelihood, yet also opened up some opportunities to learn new knowledge and skills, and sometimes, to prosper. For many people, joining the Maoists was like getting a new job. They fulfilled their daily needs and used the power they gained to obtain income and properties.

7.5. Conclusion

The civil conflict had a mixed effect on income opportunities and livelihoods in rural areas. Analysis of both economic and non-economic attributes of survival indicates that the Nepalese armed conflict contributed to the poverty cycle for rural people by altering existing means of survival. Despite the overall negative effect, a few found new opportunities to increase their livelihoods. Anecdotal evidence indicates the impact was complex, contextual and dynamic, yet it was also the case that high caste, land-owning people generally survived the conflict with better livelihood outcomes.

Individuals and families exercised a number of strategies to maintain and secure their livelihood diversification in times of armed conflict. Out of the six important determinants of livelihoods described by Ellis (2000): risk strategies, asset strategies, labour market, credit market and coping behaviour were identified in the conflict situation in rural Nepal. Moreover, the conflict itself was an important determinant of rural livelihood diversification. The next chapter further explores how the villagers coped with the armed conflict.
Chapter 8. Coping with Armed Civil Conflict

8.1. Introduction

The previous chapters examined people’s experiences of civil conflict, exploring underlying causes and consequences. The chapters indicated that during the years of civil conflict, rural people at some points of time were effectively caught between two opposing armies. They experienced different registers of brutality and intimidation carried out both by government agents and Maoists. In this context, how did the rural people cope in a general sense with these difficult security situations? This chapter aims to provide some answers.

Existing studies of people in a war situation report a number of coping strategies in the face of conflict, stress and trauma in daily lives. Two examples of relevant literature are considered here. First, Candlin (2008) explains five types of coping strategies and emphasises that the strategies may vary according to place and people. According to Candlin (2008), the common strategies are: avoidance, accommodation, win/lose, compromising and problem solving. All of these coping strategies were used to a greater or lesser extent by nepalis during the civil war, as the quotes in this chapter reveal. Second, Suedfeld et al’s (1997) study of Holocaust survivors lists and defines 13 much more detailed coping strategies. These are presented in the table below.

Table 8.1: Coping strategies of Holocaust survivors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Confrontation</td>
<td>Effort to resolve the situation through assertive or aggressive interaction with another person.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Distancing</td>
<td>Effort to detach oneself emotionally from the situation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Self-control</td>
<td>Effort to regulate one’s own feelings or actions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Accept responsibility</td>
<td>Acknowledge that one has a role in the problem.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Escape/avoidance</td>
<td>Effort to escape or avoid the problem physically.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Planful problem-solving</td>
<td>Deliberate (rational, cognitively-oriented) effort to change or escape the situation.</td>
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</table>
7. Positive reappraisal: Effort to see a positive meaning in the situation.
8. Seeking social support: Effort to obtain sympathy, help, information, or emotional support from another person/s.
9. Endurance/obedience/effort: Effort to persevere, survive, submit, or comply with demands.
10. Compartmentalisation: Effort to encapsulate the problem psychologically so as to isolate it from other aspects of life.
11. Denial: Ignore the problem, not believe in its reality.
12. Supernatural protection: Attribute survival to religious or superstitious practices; effort to gain such protection, for example, prayer.
13. Luck: Attribute survival to good fortune.

Note: This table was developed from information given in Suedfeld et al (1997, p 163).

This set of 13 coping strategies refers specifically to the Holocaust situation. As might be expected, Nepalis dealing with the more recent civil war situation had considerably more freedom of movement, relatively speaking, and this meant a culturally different set of coping strategies was demonstrated. Most of the literature reviewed on civil conflict and coping strategies focused on the experiences of war veterans, European civilians and Holocaust survivors (see Blackburn 2005). Such coping strategies represent mainly experiences from Western countries. In contrast, Blackburn (2005, p 92) mentions that during the Japanese occupation of Singapore, ‘young women hid in their families’ houses and disguised their beauty for fear of being raped and sexually enslaved by the Japanese military’. This kind of coping strategy and action might not be found so often in accounts written in a western context.

Lack of cultural fit in regard to coping strategies is also demonstrated when attempts are made to train Eastern people to use western-influenced conflict resolution strategies. For example, in an attempt to bring conflict resolution education in Indonesia, Noel et al (2006) organised a series of workshops for school teachers and community leaders. They promoted working in cooperative groups, using cooperative techniques, the concept of non-coercive classroom management, and peer mediation as appropriate strategies. However, they found ‘authoritarian teacher roles’, one of the characteristics of Eastern culture, to be a challenge. They faced a further dilemma when local educators...
and community leaders expected a ‘bottom-up’ approach for community change. The description of their impasse leads us to consider: what kinds of approaches to coping with conflict are taken by people who have grown up in a historically rigid hierarchical non-Western system?

This chapter offers a contribution to addressing that question by examining the complex strategies and actions that local people employed to cope with the armed civil conflict in Nepal. The armed conflict challenged people’s lives and livelihoods in rural villages. There was no possibility of third party mediation for them because the Maoists or the government effectively controlled people’s movements to/from villages (Moorcraft 2006). Hence, being local residents, the rural people had to act as ‘mediators’ themselves.

Drawing from people’s factual accounts, this chapter illustrates a number of challenges that rural people faced and the most typical strategies they took to overcome such challenges. The coping strategies and actions are presented at three levels: individual, family and community. At the individual level, the discussion focuses on strategies and actions for the individual’s own safety. At the family level the discussion examines people’s strategies and actions to protect their family members and their belongings. In regard to the community level the discussion focuses on strategies and actions for the benefit of the whole community.

8.2. Strategies and Actions to Protect the Individual

During the civil conflict period, individuals faced a number of challenges and risks to their daily life. People’s accounts show that they adopted various strategies and actions to overcome the tensions and troubles that they encountered. Many of them were able to overcome or at least minimise the difficulties. Nevertheless, they frequently risked being intimidated, tortured and even killed. This section elaborates individual coping strategies and actions.
8.2.1. Hide in a Safer Place

If people were searched either by the Maoists or by the government administration, they felt endangered and embarrassed. In order to avoid unnecessary questions and intimidation, they tried to hide in a safer place for a time. The following shows how the government intimidated its citizens.

We used to protest against government brutality. I was forced to be displaced from my home … If I were at home, I would have been finished [killed] … I have been active in politics for many years … I was a District Advisor for the Janamorcha Party (T01, Int, male, 48 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 15 March 2009).

T01 was a member of one of the political parties that were against armed violence. He had to hide himself from government forces as he was threatened to be killed. When the Maoists intensified their rebellion, the government mobilised national security forces to suppress them and their supporters (Nayak 2007; Sharma 2006). The government thought it would be able to suppress the Maoist insurrection by using state security forces. Rather than bringing suspects to justice, government brutality was targeted at eliminating the opponents of individuals. Therefore, political parties which were not in power were also deemed to be against the government since they were protesting against the government and its violent activities. Many innocent individuals were arrested, tortured and even killed. In the end, T01 left his home for some time, hid in a safe place and protected himself from torture and possible death. This is an ‘avoidance’ strategy (Candlin 2008; Suedfeld 1997). Many rural people adopted this strategy during the conflict.

On the other hand, the Maoists also intimidated and tortured people. The following excerpt represents an example of this.

Groups of the Maoists used to dine at their home. Therefore, they had an opportunity to complain against me … The Maoists organised a meeting and came to my home to arrest me. At that time, I was not at home. They left a message that I
had to see them. I did not go to see them … If I had gone there, they could have killed me (B02, Int, male, 70 years, Bahun-Chhetri, Kavre district, 13 March 2009).

When the Maoists searched for this informant, he was scared. Hence, he tried to avoid encountering the Maoists. The situation was not as he thought. Because of the fear of being killed, he travelled to different places and tried to hide himself in safer places. His fear was genuine because he knew that the Maoists had killed many villagers. When the Maoists did not find him, they interrogated his family members. The family members negotiated with the Maoists that they would settle the dispute if they would not kill him. After the Maoists agreed not to kill him, the family members called him back and he returned home. It is an example of a ‘compromise’ and ‘accommodation’ strategy (Candlin 2008).

B02’s account demonstrates that the strategy of avoidance followed by the strategy of compromise and accommodation saved him and his family members. Further discussion revealed that he and his family members were able to survive because they did not act against the Maoists by reporting the case to the police and government administration. The accounts of both Tamang (T01) and Bahun-Chhetri (B02) individuals above suggest that hiding was a good survival strategy.

8.2.2. Support and/or Join the Rebellion

As an accommodation strategy, many rural people cautiously supported Maoist activities. The following account shows how one young woman acted when the Maoists insisted she join.

Once, the Maoists formed a committee in our village. Every villager had to pay them a levy, either grain or two rupees per month … They forcefully nominated me as the Secretary of the committee. I said, ‘I cannot carry out the role of the secretary. If I cannot do the job, then there is no meaning in holding the post’. They took away from me the post of Secretary but I was still an executive member. As a member, I had to attend meetings (T04, Int, female, 20 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 16 March 2009).
At that time she was only 13 years old and studying grade seven. The Maoists offered her a responsible post but she declined. She responded positively that she supported the Maoists but she did not get involved with them actively. In this case, the Maoists tried to persuade a villager rather than taking her forcefully. T04 refused to be a Maoist but committed to support them. Hence, the Maoists did not harm her but continued to approach her. Although the Maoists could not recruit this girl, they were able to recruit many other individuals into their war. The following excerpt shows how an uneducated villager joined the Maoists and worked for them.

First Person A2 had come and then Person T1 came. Later, Person L1 convinced me to join them … After the announcement of village people’s government, I was forced to be fully underground. I worked in this village for one and half years. Then I was sent to Place D3 area for another one and half years. I was Commander in my department. Again I was posted to the other side of the Roshi River. At that time I was an area member for 10 villages and secretary for a sub-area (T08, Int, male, 41 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 16 March 2009).

Due to frequent visits from Maoist leaders, this man agreed to work for them. Such a tactic could be described as a ‘compromise’ strategy (Candlin 2008). When the activities of the insurgency increased and they announced the village people’s government (Lecomte-Tilouine 2004), he had to hide from the government security forces. It means this time he adopted an ‘avoidance’ strategy (Candlin 2008). Then he was transferred to different places with higher responsibilities. He further said, ‘people welcomed us at anytime we went to them. They were angry with the police. Our team with 13 to 14 members travelled from one village to another. We mobilised villagers and kept them in important places to monitor our enemies. We organised and finished our work’ (T08, Int, male, 41 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 16 March 2009). The villagers supported the Maoists because they were not happy with the police. In addition, they protected the Maoists by monitoring the activities of the police. Here, the act of villagers could be described as a ‘win/lose’ strategy (Candlin 2008). The villagers supported the Maoists because government security forces were not able to control them. If they were able to control the Maoists, the villagers might have reported Maoist activities to them.
Informant accounts indicate that more Tamangs than Bahun-Chhetris joined and worked for the Maoists. Most Tamangs either supported the Maoists or remained neutral. Out of 33 Bahun-Chhetri and 33 Tamang in-depth interviewees, only two Bahun-Chhetris reported that they worked for the Maoists while there were 12 Tamangs who worked for the Maoists. Whether by supporting the Maoists or joining the rebellion the villagers employed compromise, avoidance and win/lose strategies. Therefore, they achieved a sense of safety most of the time. In villages, while they experienced risk from the government or its agents, they perceived they were protected by the Maoists. However, their lives were in danger when they travelled out of their villages.

8.2.3. Travel Carefully

According to informants, travelling was quite difficult during the conflict period. They were always scared of being trapped in violent incidents. Therefore, they attempted to avoid such difficulties by travelling only in daylight. While travelling, they stopped on the way if they felt there were risks ahead. They also said that they did not travel if the situation was inviting confrontation. For example, they cancelled their journey if they knew armed Maoists or government security personnel were also travelling.

The strategy to avoid violent incidents was not always possible. Sometimes the Maoists called people to participate in a mass gathering and they threatened to punish people who did not come along. The following story is an example of such a situation.

Once I went to Place H1 [a distant village] to attend a public gathering. That was during the period of state of emergency. I went there because I was scared. I heard that if people did not attend the gathering they would kill us. The Maoists had organised the meeting … I did not attend the protest rally. I went by a public bus and returned by another public bus (B26, FGD, female, 42 years, Bahun-Chhetri, Dhankuta district, 11 April 2009).

In this case the woman attended the gathering because she was scared of being killed if she did not go there. In other words, she accommodated the demands of the Maoists. She did not walk in the protest rally but used public buses assuming that she would travel safely. However, sometimes travelling by public vehicles was also not safe. The
risk increased when the fighting parties were also using public transport. The following account chronicles such a dangerous situation.

I was returning home from work. I had caught the last bus for that day. On the way, government soldiers stopped the bus and threatened the bus driver. They took control of the bus and about 50 soldiers rode on the bus with us … Suddenly, the Maoists fired on the bus … The firing immediately killed two passengers … The Maoists shot at a soldier standing at my side. He fell down … I picked up the dead body on my shoulder and lay down on his blood on the bus floor … The Maoists were also throwing bombs (T05, FGD, male, 20 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 16 March 2009).

Although T05 was trapped in the war, he survived, while many were killed. He used a dead body to block the bullets but he had nothing to stop bomb explosions. Despite the danger being out of his control, he returned home alive. This man was brave enough to hold a dead body to protect him, a prime example of compromise as a coping strategy. Many others tried to ensure that their travel would be safe, but it was always uncertain.

The coping strategies and actions discussed above are within human agency, that is, people thought they were able to protect themselves because they used their own wisdom and power. This matches the strategy identified by Suedfeld et al (1997, p 163) of ‘planful problem-solving’. Informant data indicated that Bahun-Chhetris might have been more ‘planful’ than Tamangs but there was not any straightforward evidence of this. The Bahun-Chhetris might have developed better strategies because they were better informed due to the existing communication network that uses Nepali language most commonly. For example, during fieldwork, interactions with Bahun-Chhetris were not problematic but some Tamangs, particularly those who were living on their traditional land, did not understand the interview questions. They required elaboration of the inquiry in the Tamang language. This indicates that they might have been disadvantaged linguistically and remained unaware of travel risks.

The practical coping strategies considered so far were able to protect individuals to some extent. On the other hand, there is great belief in the supernatural in Nepal. The
following sub-section presents people’s stories that illustrate strategies considered to be ‘supernatural protection’ (Suedfeld et al 1997, p 163).

Figure 8.1: Hindu spiritual actions to please a divine power

The Bahun-Chhetris regularly participate in various collective spiritual events. Even during the civil conflict, this practice continued. In effect, these events supported them and allowed them to update the situation with each other while they prayed to their Gods together for protection. Such events were rare among Tamangs, who have a different spiritual tradition.

8.2.4. Use Spiritual Skills

Many people depended on divine power for their protection, and believed a divine force had the power to save them (Figure 8.1). Some interviewees believed they were saved by God through their spiritual knowledge, skill and devotion. For example, one informant was a 60 year old widow who lost her husband 24 years ago. She had not attended any school but raised her three daughters in the absence of her husband believing that God would take care of her. During the conflict, the Maoists visited everyone’s house except two, hers and another one. She trusted God and kept on worshipping as her safeguard. When visited in the evening, she was busy worshipping. She explained that it was the God who had protected her till now, even during the civil conflict.

Experiences differ from person to person. Some people do not believe in spiritual power while some do. Another informant also claimed that he used his spiritual skill to escape from the Maoists. The following excerpt shows the situation.
They found me and took me into custody. They inquired about the misuse of money. I said I had not misused any … They said, ‘you are going to die soon. We will not leave you even for a moment’. Many people recommended my release but they did not agree … I was worried; I felt as if the sky was squashing me; and my mouth dried out … I had learnt cleverness. I had also learnt Indrajaal [a kind of spiritual skill] … It was raining that night. Four armed Maoists were on duty. They did not fall asleep. They were surrounding me. I had to pass through two doors. [He applied his Mantra here] I walked slowly through the first door. They were staring at me but could not do anything. I also passed the second door … I arrived at my home (B02, Int, male, 70 years, Bahun-Chhetri, Kavre district, 13 March 2009).

Using his spiritual skill the informant deluded armed Maoists who were controlling him. He then walked away although the guarding Maoists were looking at him. As the interview progressed, this informant said he had used his spiritual skills at different times. He confidently claimed that spiritual skills were effective to alter risk situations even during the Maoist insurgency. When asked he refused to share the particular ‘Mantra’. According to him, just knowing the Mantra does not work. One should take a long journey of devotion to make the Mantra effective. He said it took more than three years to confirm that his Mantras were effective when he applied them. However, he confirmed that this kind of magic power was only effective for short periods. The Tamangs also practise the use of Mantras but none of the informants reported any significant usage in relation to the civil conflict.

The discussion above shows that people living in rural areas applied numerous strategies and actions to cope with the difficult security situations. Despite their attempts to survive, their lives were always in danger. The Maoists mobilised the masses to resist the government and launched a campaign of ‘one village, one unit, one house, one friend’ in rural areas (Yami 2007, p 44). This kind of campaign exposed rural people to an equal risk borne by the Maoist army who were taking arms with a sense of sacrifice and martyrdom. By and large, rural people did not have anyone to provide them with protection. They suffered and they were frightened (Bhattarai 2007). They had to think and act quickly. In general, during the conflict period, family members played very important roles to protect each other.
8.3. Strategies and Actions to Protect the Family

During the fieldwork, most of informants were living in extended families. Informants said that every family member was in danger of being killed. Some members, particularly younger ones, were specifically targeted to join the insurgency. If a member of a family was suspected either by the Maoists or by the government security forces, his/her whole family faced difficulties. Therefore, it was better to show some level of co-operation rather than opposing brutality and hardship.

8.3.1. Be Neutral and/or Do No Harm to Others

Maintaining neutrality and carrying out those activities which did not harm anyone was one of the most important strategies to cope with the armed civil conflict. In many interactions, informants said, ‘nabiraaunu nadaraaunu’ [do not do wrong, do not get worried]. They pointed out that they carried out their activities cautiously. For example, one informant was a tuition teacher for secondary school students. He experienced pressure both from the Maoists and the government army. He gave the following account.

I used to tell them that as the farmers do farming; this was my farming for survival … I work here for 15 to 16 hours. When they asked for money I asked them, ‘you do not have to teach my students; if you just stand as long as I stand, I will give you 50 per cent of my earnings’ … I did not make any mistake and I was not afraid (T03, Int, male, 27 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 16 March 2009).

As both the Maoists and government security forces were monitoring this informant’s activities, his working environment was quite risky. Yet, he continued his everyday work and was not tortured by the contending armed groups. The Maoists had asked him to remove his tuition centre’s banner and to donate some money. He removed the banner but did not agree to give money. He warned the Maoists that he would stop tutoring if they forced him to pay. As tutoring was very important for the success of local students and as he was working very hard, the Maoists did not use force to control him. More importantly, he maintained neutrality and did not take the side of either
armed group. He managed to accommodate and compromise (Candlin 2008). As a result, he was not tortured and his family was not affected directly. The Maoists did not visit his home nor did they ask for food and shelter. Although the Maoists imposed their rules and demanded money from almost everyone, it seems that sometimes they did not assault people if they were working hard and did not act against the Maoists.

People had to act cautiously on every occasion. On one hand, they had to ensure that the Maoists would not punish them. On the other hand, they had to remain safe from the government security forces. In doing so, Tamangs like T03 above were found to be mainly reactive. However, there were a few Bahun-Chhetris who were proactive in dealing with the contending parties. For example,

During the civil conflict, I invited 40 to 50 Maoists to eat at my home. They did not come forcefully. I do not know why they did not come like this. Maybe, because I invited them they decided not to come forcefully … When Maoists were eating at my home, my son went outside and ensured that government security forces were not coming … Although I supported the Maoists, I have not taken their membership yet (B01, Int, male, 42 years, Bahun-Chhetri, Kavre district, 13 March 2009).

This informant called the Maoists to dine at his home when there was no danger from the government side. By doing this he ensured that the Maoists perceived him as their supporter, but he was not. He did not take their membership so that he was also safe from the government side. Consequently, he did not harm or support the contending parties directly and his family remained safe. Here, the informant employed accommodation (Candlin 2008) and planful problem-solving (Suedfeld et al 1997) strategies. This was a tactful precaution. Some people developed good personal relationships with the contending parties and managed to be safe from both sides.

8.3.2. Develop Personal Goodwill

Other informants said they protected themselves and their families because they established good relationships with the Maoists and the government security forces. However, this was a very risky double game. The following is an example.
I was able to survive because I was able to maintain trust with both opponents: the Maoists and the government army … I used to go to the army camp and used to play cards with them. Hence, they were my friends. Here in the village, I had contact with the Maoists and they used to store weapons and war materials in my house. They thought my house was the safest place for them. Because of the prevailing situation, I had to maintain a ‘dual policy’ … I was able to keep a balance and maintain a trusting environment. The army never searched my house and the Maoists were confident that if they stored their goods in my house it would not be searched (T01, Int, male, 48 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 15 March 2009).

We can see here that the game played for survival was dangerous. Some people developed such skills because of their different life experiences and knowledge of the civil conflict over time. They believed that if they could win someone’s trust they would be safe and so would their families. Following Candlin (2008), this can be interpreted as both accommodation and compromise strategies. This is also an example of ‘planful problem-solving’ (Suedfeld et al 1997) because the informant took action with a careful plan.

In another example, when T01’s son was charged by local Maoists for a dispute, the son managed to lessen the punishment when he met one of the Maoist leaders with whom his father had a good personal relationship. These kinds of cases were also found on the government side. They also released someone without punishment if they had known them or their families. The following accounts from Tamang and Bahun-Chhetri informants illustrate this strategy.

Case 1: The Tamangs

I was arrested from Place B1. Someone had informed the police that I was engaged in Maoist activities. Fortunately, I had known some people [police]. I had worked for them in Place L2. When the Police Inspector at Place B1 saw me, he said that he knew me. He said I was an honest Tamang boy. That is why I was released (T29, Int, male, 32 years, Tamang, Morang district, 07 April 2009).
Case 2: The Bahun-Chhetris

One of my friends survived because the Major [high rank officer] of the government army recognised him. Once, he had gone to treat the Maoists and he was arrested by the government army. He was going to be killed … He had a medical shop in Place II where the Major had taken his kids for treatment … The Major recognised my friend and released him, so he survived (B09, Int, male, 42 years, Bahun-Chhetri, Kavre district, 20 March 2009).

In both cases, arrested individuals were released because of personal goodwill. In case 1, the informant who was working for the Maoists at that time was released because the Police Inspector perceived him as ‘an honest Tamang’ boy. In case 2, the arrested health worker was released because, some time in the past, he had cured the officer’s children when they were sick, so the officer considered him positively. Sometimes ‘a goodwill relationship’ was very helpful to protect individuals and their families. Such a relationship was developed through an individual approach by participating in various group activities, for example, playing cards and meeting people. Social and work-related ‘good personal behaviour’, for example, treatment by a health worker in the case of government army officer or service by a local villager in the case of police officer, was also fundamental to save individuals and their dependent family members. These actions seem close to what Suedfeld et al (1997, p 163) called ‘seeking social support’. Here, the victims received social support indirectly through contacts who held higher authority in their agencies. In fact, seeking social support directly was unsafe during the civil conflict. In many cases, people avoided dangerous situations by keeping quiet or simply following the orders of the armed groups.

8.3.3. Keep Silent and/or Follow Orders

Many villagers reported that they kept their mouths closed although they were not happy about the way they were being treated. Depending upon different difficult situations, they not only kept their silence but also followed the orders of the opposing parties. For example,

I was the chair of ‘good-governance club’ in my village … The Maoists blamed me for the fact that the club was a supporter of the monarch. They also threatened to kill
me. I told them that the club was not monarchist but they did not believe me … The Maoists forced me to resign from the club … I resigned and handed over the documents to them as demanded. Maoist’s local in-charge said that that was not enough. He demanded that I publish the resignation notice in a newspaper. I paid Rs 500 and published the notice in the Kavre Post (T09, Int, male, 30 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 17 March 2009).

This account shows that the informant was ordered to resign from the post of chair and to dissolve his club. According to him, the club aimed to raise public awareness on existing laws and practices. The club members were volunteers. They wanted people to discuss whether the existing laws and practices were enough to provide justice for them. If people were not getting justice, then they mobilised people for the formation of acceptable law and order. In the beginning, the local Maoists did not understand this. Later, when they understood they said they should not have dissolved the club. It was already too late to start the club again. The chair not only resigned from the post but reported it to the concerned institution and published a notice in a local newspaper. The local Maoists had already threatened to kill him if he did not resign. The informant used an obedience strategy (Suedfeld et al 1997) and saved his life. He did not debate unnecessarily and kept quiet.

The following two narratives show another dimension of keeping silence and following orders.

**Case 1: The Tamangs**

I participated in the war but I did not harm anyone. I thought other people were also like me … I cooked for the Maoists. I also worked as a ‘watch dog’ and informed them whether enemies were coming … The security situation was very tight. If I had collected money, that would have increased social turbulence. If social turbulence had increased, I would have been killed … if I were instructed to demand Rs 40,000, I told the leaders that the villager offered me only Rs 10,000. Hence, I did not accept that little amount (T29, Int, male, 32 years, Tamang, Morang district, 07 April 2009).
Case 2: The Bahun-Chhetris

One day I heard a knocking sound on my door … We had gone already to bed … I heard voices calling us ‘mommy’, ‘daddy’! I think they said it two or three times. Who would call us daddy and mommy? The voice was that of an adult. They said, ‘this family has already slept’. I got up after a while; opened a window and watched outside. I saw a group of 10 to 15 people going to that side. It was around 8 or 9 o’clock in the evening … I do not know where they went (B05, Int, female, 35 years, Bahun-Chhetri, Kavre district, 14 March 2009).

In both stories, informants’ silence put them in a less dangerous situation. The aim of the silence was to protect their families and maintain peace in their communities. T29 above accepted responsibility in the Maoist-led people’s war and obeyed Maoist orders. He remained quiet because any action would create difficulties in his village. Similarly, B05 also kept quiet when the strangers came to her house so that she did not encounter the Maoists. Both employed an avoidance strategy (Candlin 2008) but their contexts were quite different. Most villagers used their conscience very carefully and participated in only some Maoist activities. They compromised with the combatants but also accommodated social relationships to ensure their safety (Candlin 2008). It is important to note that even within ‘the Maoist money collection drive’ the act of silence helped to reduce risks for individuals, their families and neighbours.

8.3.4. Make Donations

With a few exceptions, all informants said they and their neighbours donated something at some point in time to the Maoists. Some donated money; others donated grains and vegetables; and some donated their labour for carrying goods, weapons and other war materials. They believe that because of their donations they were saved. Considerable sums of money were sometimes given to the Maoists. Most villagers knew or at least guessed correctly who in their village had paid lots of money. The following shows how the Maoists were able to collect money for the war effort and why people paid them.

The Maoists demanded money. They telephoned me many times … I heard that many people were killed when they did not give money. I asked my sons. They also advised me to give it to them … I gave the amount they demanded. Later, they [the
Maoists] gave me four receipts worth Rs 25,000 each … I have kept them secret. If the government army had found them, we might have been killed … The Maoists threatened me because my sons were abroad. I gave the amount they had demanded (B14, Int, male, 72 years, Bahun-Chhetri, Morang district, 08 April 2009).

This informant was scared of being killed and donated the demanded amount to the Maoists. He discussed the problem with his family members and they agreed to pay for his survival. In his narrative the phrase: ‘I heard that many people were killed when they did not give money’, is notable. Further exploration revealed that initially, he tried to avoid paying that much money because he was a social worker and he did not oppress anyone. In his attempt to avoid creating a conflict (Candlin 2008), he left his village and went to another place where he owned some farmland. The Maoists followed him there too and threatened his family members. He found that local Maoists wanted him to donate a large amount because he was well-off and his sons were living abroad. As the local Maoists were involved in his case, the family decided to pay the demanded amount so that all of them would survive. He and his family compromised with the difficult security situation and accommodated the Maoist demands using the kinds of strategies identified by Candlin (2008).

The above mentioned informant was not able to reduce the demanded amount but some interviewees were able to negotiate with the Maoists and reduce the donation amount. The following account is taken from an informant who was able to do so.

The Maoists had sent me a notice. I asked my grand-daughter what the letter was about. I cannot read and write. She said, ‘grandpa, the Maoists have demanded Rs 50,000’. I was astonished to receive the letter … The Maoists called me in that house [he was pointing a neighbour’s house] … They warned me that they would tie me up with ropes … I requested them … I would donate Rs 20,000. You should exempt Rs 30,000. They said, ‘no’ … I wrote my story … to … an active Maoist. He advised me that I better agree to pay Rs 25,000 … he said that I could refer to him … I counted Rs 13,000 and … later … gave the remaining amount (T10, Int, male, 72 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 17 March 2009).
T10 was able to negotiate for half of the demanded amount with the help of another Maoist who was a distant relative. The Maoists tortured him mentally and warned that they would torture him physically if he did not pay. At that time, he did not have money. He borrowed money to pay the Maoists. The strategies used by T10 can be viewed as accommodation and problem-solving strategies (Candlin 2008).

In both cases above, family members acted jointly to save another family member. All informants reported that donations were involuntary but there was a space for a negotiation, particularly if there was someone familiar within the Maoists. Excluding a few special cases, refusal of donations was not accepted. Ogura (2004, pp 123-124) reports that the Maoists operated a military campaign with the slogan: ‘those who have money have to give cash, those who have food have to give rice, those who have clothes have to give clothes, and those who have nothing have to give one member of their family’. In the case of refusal, individuals and their family members were punished by ‘forced labour, beatings and even death’ (Gersony 2003, p 96). To avoid Maoist punishment, rural people donated whatever they could, sometimes even borrowing from others to do so.

In order to cope with the difficulties and to lessen deterioration of livelihoods, individuals and families adopted a number of coping strategies and actions. This section has examined some important strategies and actions that contributed to protect individuals and their families. These strategies and actions were crucial since both the Maoists and the government arrested many innocent people, tortured them, made them disappear and killed them (Bhattarai 2007). Moreover, the challenges and risks were very high because in the Nepalese context, war is often equated with sacrifice (Lecomte-Tilouine 2006). Lecomte-Tilouine (2006, p 52) points out that a warrior’s duty is ‘to offer the sacrifice [to kill] or to be offered in the sacrifice [to die]’. This ethos indicates a high risk of death, both for civilians and the military, during the armed civil conflict period. Evidence from the fieldwork also showed that the strategies of individuals and families were important for the security of the community.
8.4. Strategies and Actions to Protect the Community

Conflict-induced risks were not only for individuals and families but also for whole communities. In such difficult situations, some people acted to protect both their own family members and their neighbours. However, they only attempted to help their neighbours if what they were doing would not endanger themselves and their own family. It means that they took risks for their neighbours after considering whether a situation was favourable or not. To do so, they needed lots of courage.

8.4.1. Act Confidently and Be Bold

As shown in the previous section, despite the Maoist demand for donations, some people were able to negotiate. In a few cases, they did not have to pay up because they acted confidently and boldly. The following excerpt illustrates this.

The Maoists … demanded from us three-quintal of rice and Rs 50,000 … I told them we had supported the Maoists. We would accept if they reigned in the government. If we had three quintal of rice, that would be enough for us for a year. They were there with their pistols. One of them moved his pistol inside his pocket and made a noise. I said to them not to try to scare me. In addition, I told him that I knew others from the Maoist army who had told us to report to them if someone demanded money from us. I had met one of them a few hours ago. Then they left my home (T27, Int, female, 54 years, Tamang, Morang district, 06 April 2009).

When asked for large donations this informant acted confidently and boldly. She was not afraid of the Maoist guns. Instead, she referred to the Maoist army for her protection. She said that she became so courageous because she had been serving her villagers as a trained community health volunteer since 1989. She learnt to speak and act confidently through training and experience over two decades. Because she had served her villagers when they needed it, she was sure that they would support her if she was in trouble.
As she knew all her villagers she investigated who had sent the Maoists to her house. She learnt that one of her neighbours had sent them. She visited her neighbour and said she could not provide what was demanded. She asked why she should be directed to donate three quintal of rice and Rs 50,000 when she had supported the Maoists many times. In response, her neighbour admitted that they had demanded a lot, and those Maoists who were terrorising her family did not come again.

Repetition of such demands was normal during the war period. T27 received another demand from another Maoist. She said,

Again a Limbu sent a Maoist. He asked me for Rs 150,000 and three quintal of rice. A boy was waiting for me when I arrived at home at around 4 p.m. … He asked me, ‘where is “father” [informant’s husband]?’ I told him he had gone to the bazaar and would return at night only. He told me that he had to discuss assistance to them with my husband. I asked him to talk with me as I looked after my house … He threatened me, ‘what can you do if the Maoists aim guns at your chest?’ I replied that everyone should die one day. I was ready to die … I shouted at him, ‘how can you aim your guns at me?’ A group of women arrived. Then the boy left my house (T27, Int, female, 54 years, Tamang, Morang district, 06 April 2009).

We can see four messages in this narrative. First, the amount of demand was increased threefold over the previous amount. It signifies that the Maoists were still intending to collect a large amount from this family. Second, the representative Maoist wanted to talk with the male member of the family. The Maoists thought that they could collect money if they approached the male member. Third, this informant did not allow them to meet her husband but dealt with the case herself. She responded audaciously to the terrorising Maoist. Finally, the Maoist left when a group of women came to see her. It means that the Maoists, especially the male Maoists, could not stand in front of brave women on this occasion. The woman’s position became stronger while she was surrounded by other women.

The example shows that people’s confident and bold actions against the Maoists needed support from the villagers. The woman was able to reject the Maoist demand for money because of her social position. She was a community volunteer and her neighbours were
not against her. In the village there was another brave woman like her. She also talked straight with the Maoists. She was not in the village at the time of interview but her husband was there. He agreed that his wife and T27 were very brave in dealing with the Maoists.

Despite the repeated threats, T27 did not report her case to the government officials. She did not feel that the government could solve her problem and provide her with safety. She did not want to increase the risk for herself and her family. With the support of her family members and fellow women, T27 continued resisting Maoist demands. This is an example of a confrontation strategy (Suedfeld et al 1997) which worked successfully due to the social support strategies of the family and the community. It is clear from this story that during the civil conflict, and depending upon the situation, rural people were sometimes able to act promptly and confidently with the support of other local people. In this case, perhaps, the woman’s luck was good (see Suedfeld et al 1997). One week later, the government army killed the local Maoist leader who had demanded a large sum of money from her.

Another two Tamang women in another research district were also perceived to be very bold and active during the conflict. However, no Bahun-Chhetri woman was reported in such a position.

8.4.2. Lobby and Negotiate

To negotiate for suffering people and to advocate on behalf of them was a risky job during the armed civil conflict. Despite the risk, there were some people in the villages who explained their ideas and action in line with the objectives of the contending parties for the protection of their fellow villagers. The following excerpt is an example of a village leader who lobbied and negotiated for his co-villagers.

A man was shot dead [by the Maoists] in my neighbouring village … Many people were arrested on suspicion [by the government]. I led the delegation to release them. I was threatened that I would be killed … We had to save our citizens. I warned them [government administrators] not to kill people. If someone was confirmed as the criminal, he should be punished as per law. I told the Police Inspector that he could
arrest me if I had done wrong but he must not touch me if I had not done wrong (B10, Int, male, 47 years, Bahun-Chhetri, Kavre district, 21 March 2009).

When the Maoists carried out their operation and killed a villager, the police intervened and arrested other villagers suspecting that they were supporters of the Maoists. At that time B10 was elected chair of the local government and was leading a delegation of people so that innocent people might not be punished. Using his positional power, he met the Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP) and managed to release his people. For this lobbying action, he was supported by his villagers, and it seems that in belonging to the Bahun-Chhetri group, he could deal with the Bahun-Chhetri administrators with less danger.

In another case, a local Maoist negotiated with his seniors at district level and saved the life of a neighbour. The neighbour was a member of the Nepali Congress Party and was elected village committee chair for many years. Therefore, the Maoist district leaders listed him as one of the agents of the oppressive government and ordered local Maoists to finish him up. The following story explains how the neighbour was saved.

He was a political worker for the Nepali Congress. Our district leader instructed us to kill him. I requested some time before killing him. Then I met him and discussed the situation. I advised him to resign from Congress and not to work against the Maoists. He would be allowed, however, to remain as an inactive Congress member. In that way he could save his life. Otherwise he would have been killed. He agreed with my advice. He resigned from active membership and published it in the newspapers. He gave me a copy of the paper. Then he was not killed (T17, Int, male, 55 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 19 March 2009).

Both accounts from B10 and T17 show that one neighbour protected another neighbour although they were members of opposing political parties. The neighbours gained social support (Suedfeld et al 1997) because of their good relationship. In T17’s account, the important point to be noted here is that despite being a member of the ruling party, the Tamang neighbour followed the advice of a Tamang Maoist. He employed the strategy of compromise, and obeyed (Suedfeld et al 1997). After that event, the Maoists considered him a supporter of the people’s war and granted his life.
This implies that the local Maoists did not kill even a [party nominated] enemy if the person was helpful to them. They helped each other and employed a notion of ‘give and take’. In other words, despite the different life threatening situations, it was somehow possible to lobby and negotiate for each other’s existence. The lives of neighbours were saved by the patronage of local Maoist and non-Maoist leaders. In many situations, individuals managed to save their life by taking support from others.

8.4.3. Take Support from Others

When villagers were in trouble, they attempted to gain support from other people, particularly from village leaders or from local Maoists. They did it to ensure that support came from someone who could be truly helpful for them. Ensuring safety of people was quite difficult and every one was at risk of their life. The following narrative shows how B10 dealt with the government administrators when a Maoist combatant took refuge in his home.

One of the Maoist army left the Maoists as he was frustrated. He came to his home. Then the police searched for him because the people who had suffered from the Maoists informed them … At night he came to my home … He asked me for help … Next day, I went to district headquarters … I met the DSP … First I created an environment for discussion. I said, ‘if a patient does not tell a doctor about his problem of sex organs because of shame he will not be cured. Similarly, if I do not tell you my problem, my problem will not be solved’. He asked me to tell the problem. I told him, ‘I had an ex-Maoist in my village. What are rights of a DSP as per the law? You can either sentence the Maoist or release him. The Maoist should be safe. If he had to die, may he die of your shot’. The DSP asked me to bring the Maoist. Next day morning I took the Maoist and his father to the DSP (B10, Int, male, 47 years, Bahun-Chhetri, Kavre district, 21 March 2009).

This story so far indicates that when a young villager abandoned the Maoist camp he faced potential danger from police and approached a local leader for assistance. The leader dared to explore if he could help him. He went to district headquarters and met the DSP, the highest rank police officer in that district. He presented his case in such a
way that the DSP would take it positively. He requested that his young villager should be handled lawfully. After he got a form of assurance, he took the ex-Maoist to the DSP. Before presenting the Maoist to the DSP, the informant taught him what to say and what not to say. For example, tell the police ‘I had nothing at home’; ‘the Maoists allured me with the promise of a job’, and do not tell them ‘other people’s names’. Ensuring that the Maoist could reply to the queries of police correctly, he was presented for interrogation.

The police interrogated him for a long period. Then he was taken to the Chief District Officer (CDO) for the final decision. The CDO carried out additional interrogation. He expressed his anger, with ‘widely opened red eyes’. He asked what the Maoists’ real names were. To present an emotional judgement and to support his villager, B10 politely asked the CDO, ‘would the Maoists who are shaking the whole of Nepal tell their real names to this Naathe [vagabond], a stupid boy? What are you saying your honour?’ In response the CDO said, ‘you found a clever chair [B10 was local government chair at that time] and you may stay alive’. Then the young ex-Maoist was released pending the next appointment. On a request from B10, the DSP issued letters to the corresponding police stations that the boy was under his observation and custody.

As he was an ex-Maoist, the boy’s life was still in danger in his village. Therefore, B10 sent him to the city where he could work for his survival. A distancing strategy (Suedfeld et al 1997) was applied to protect the boy. In short, an informant who was a village leader eventually managed to protect his co-villager although the boy had worked for the Maoists.

In another case, a villager saved the life of a Maoist. The Maoist was severely injured in a battle. While his friends were taking him for treatment, they left him in a farm field and ran away because they feared encountering the government army on the way. The injured Maoist was lying in the farm field for several days unnoticed by anyone. Later, the owner of the farm field found him when he came to harvest grass for his cattle. The injured Maoist requested the landlord/villager to help him. The villager could not take him to his home because the government security forces were very active in his village. Therefore, he took the injured man to the jungle and put him in a cave. He waited there for several weeks. The villager supplied food and water for him when he went to collect
fodder in jungle. An avoidance strategy (Candlin 2008; Suedfeld et al 1997) was applied here, and social support was also evident. When the search activity of government security forces was reduced, the villager called the injured Maoist’s family. Then his family took him to India for treatment.

From these accounts we can see that both ‘taking support from others’ and ‘providing support to others’ were not easy tasks. Both the government administration and the Maoists were closely observing key individuals’ activities. The Maoists always warned villagers not to spy against them. Informant accounts suggest that the Bahun-Chhetris were more active than the Tamangs in seeking and providing support to/from their neighbours. While such support was not accessible or was perceived to be less effective, some villagers left their home searching for safety for themselves and their family members.

8.4.4. Migrate to a Safer Place

Depending upon the local situation, families responded to the civil conflict in different ways. In order to reduce personal risk and risks to family members, many people moved to safer places, for example, district headquarters, cities and even abroad.

It seems that going abroad was one of the safest strategies at that time. This strategy is close to ‘distancing’ and ‘avoidance’ strategies (Candlin 2008; Suedfeld et al 1997). The following excerpt shows how a villager escaped.

I worked for the Maoist army for three to four months in 2001 … I participated in the attack in Solukhumbu. Many people were killed … After that event, I returned home and supported the Maoists in my village … In 2005 they kept me in custody because I opposed their attack on people’s business in my village … I was kept in custody in my home. I had to visit them every 15 days … After two months I went abroad. I worked there for 18 months (T14, FGD, male, 27 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 18 March 2009).

This informant had become a supporter of the Maoists after attending a mass gathering organised by Tamang Mukti Morcha [one of the Maoists’ sister organisations] in 2001.
According to him, 31 youths including him joined the Maoist army from that mass gathering because they were impressed. This is an example of the strategy of accepting responsibility (Suedfeld et al 1997). He also participated in an attack that resulted in mass killing. Then he left the Maoist army; came back home and remained a supporter of the Maoists. Though he was a Maoist, he opposed other Maoists when they attacked his neighbours. Here, the informant used a ‘confrontation’ strategy (Suedfeld et al 1997) to safeguard his neighbours but it did not work. He was punished for it. To avoid further trouble, he went abroad.

Whenever the top Maoist leaders imposed policies, local Maoist leaders and workers implemented them according to local situations. Hence, the Maoist actions differed from place to place. To protect themselves and their families, many rural people left their homes and moved to comparatively safer places. Another example is presented below.

The Maoists ate and slept in our home … The situation was not favourable to oppose them. If I had opposed, they could have done anything … If the government’s security forces had come, we might have been killed. Sometimes I spent overnight in the nearby bazaar. My family lived here [at home]. I even went to live in Biratnagar [a nearby sub-metropolitan city] for a year in 2003. At that time I took my family with me … There were some Maoists in my village. I was scared because I knew they were going to punish me. I had won the latest village election (T28, Int, male, 45 years, Tamang, Morang district, 07 April 2009).

Being a people’s representative in his village, T28 was responsible to the government but the Maoists were taking benefits from him. The Maoists had asked him to join with them but he disagreed because he was a member of the United Marxist Leninist Party. Later, his neighbours informed him that the Maoists were planning to punish him. This information was very important for his safety. He took his family and fled to a safer place in a nearby city. On further discussion, T28 said he could have gone on living in his village if he paid a ransom donation to the Maoists. So, by moving to a safer place, he also escaped from paying a large amount. Despite being a people’s representative, he was not in a situation to advocate for jurisdiction. In other cases, village leaders
advocated for community members so that they were saved from further brutality and the possibility of killing.

Among the four strategies discussed above, the strategy ‘to leave a place’ was more often applicable than others. During the war, thousands of people left their homes in rural villages, some forever and others temporarily. They moved to supposedly safer places like cities and abroad, particularly India (Webster and Gurung 2005; Huntington 2002). Going to India was easier because of the ‘open border’ and ‘no need of visa approval’. By leaving their original places, they could avoid being press-ganged by the Maoists or targeted by the government’s security forces (Smith 2002). Yet, as shown above, many other villagers managed to stay in their villages acting confidently and being bold or negotiating with emerging local circumstances.

The testimonies analysed above are a view of rural life during the civil conflict in Nepal. A similar analysis of life for children and adolescents in the Lebanese war reports that children’s greatest fear was losing their families (Assal and Farrell 1992). This study shows, in the context of the Nepalese civil conflict, how fear was experienced by individuals, families and neighbours. Rural people during the Nepali conflict acted in a number of strategic ways to protect their family and kin, and to survive. Unfortunately, they were not always successful, as the casualty and injury figures show.

8.5. Recognisable Coping Strategies

This chapter has presented examples of coping strategies as they were told by informants. The interpretation and comparison of these strategies with the existing literature showed that most of the coping strategies employed by the Nepalese people resemble coping strategies identified in studies from other countries. Yet, despite their resemblance to the coping strategies recognised by Candlin (2008) and also by Suedfeld et al (1997), they exhibit different meanings and were applied differently in the Nepalese socio-cultural environment. The strategies identified in the Nepalese context do not precisely match the coping strategies that were identified in other contexts. For example, if we simply gloss ‘hide in a safer place’ as an ‘avoidance’ strategy (Candlin 2008; Suedfeld et al 1997), the real, local meaning of ‘hide in a safer place’ is obscured.
During the dangerous security situation, Nepalese people hid in a safer place to make sure they did have any unnecessary encounters of any kind with the contending parties: the Maoists and government agencies. The mild term ‘avoidance’ does not convey the desperate strategy of hiding. Rural Nepalis hid away to protect themselves because they were fearful of, and intimidated by, any contact with the Maoists and the government forces. As a strategy, this is also a form of resistance against the actions of the contending parties.

During the civil conflict period, while the Maoists and the government were fighting against each other, ordinary people (those who did not belong to the Maoists or the government) were resisting them, sometimes directly, but far more often, indirectly. The ordinary people were perhaps exhibiting what James C Scott (1985) calls, ‘everyday forms of peasant resistance’. In his book *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, Scott demonstrated how Malaysian villagers employed different forms of implicit resistance against the landlords and the state, such as false compliance (Scott 1985, p xvi). Ordinary Nepalese people, who had little power in the civil conflict situation, demonstrated similar forms of indirect resistance against the Maoists and the government troops. For example, by hiding in a safer place, they were resisting potential brutality. When they were asked for money, they did not donate to the Maoists readily. When asked by government troops about the location of Maoists, they did not inform government soldiers about the location of the Maoist soldiers, or the reverse. In summary, from relatively powerless positions, they typically demonstrated implicit resistance to the contending parties by such strategies as hiding in a safer place, taking support from their neighbours, keeping silence, doing no harm and so on. Informant accounts suggest that the Bahun-Chhetris resisted patiently and more intellectually while the Tamangs appeared to be direct and confrontational. Yet, because there was rarely any direct confrontation by rural Nepalis to either of the warring parties, it seems more appropriate to identify them as ‘coping strategies’ rather than ‘protest/resistance strategies’. In everyday life during the civil war, safety and survival were their most important concerns.
8.6. Conclusion

The Nepalese armed civil conflict created a situation where nobody felt they were safe. Everyone was always scared of possible detention, torture, injury and untimely death. They could neither sleep properly nor could they travel with certainty. Life was always uncertain. In the face of such difficulties, people developed different strategies and actions to save themselves, their loved ones and their neighbours.

The coping strategies and actions varied from one person to another person, from one place to another place and from one situation to another situation. Over a period of difficult time, people developed their skills and confidence gradually. The coping strategy of ‘planful problem-solving’ (Suedfeld et al 1997, p 163) was found everywhere in the data gathered for this project. Moreover, the five coping strategies identified by Candlin (2008): avoidance, accommodation, win/lose, compromising and problem solving were found to be used to a greater or lesser extent by Nepalis during the civil war, as the quotes in this chapter have revealed. Nevertheless, the cultural detail of these coping strategies indicates the context of rural Nepal. People developed such strategies not only during the decade-long civil conflict but over a period of many decades because Nepalese have witnessed a long but largely undocumented history of popular insurrections.

Figure 8.2 below represents the different coping strategies identified in this chapter. These strategies provided protection, benefit and sometimes even gain to an individual, his/her family and community. This was facilitated by the collective nature (Noel et al 2006) of Nepalese society. In essence, the coping strategies were developed to save lives.
From this chapter it can be concluded that rural people in the civil conflict tried to avoid trouble: death, torture, danger, costs and so on. Among a number of successful strategies, ‘negotiation’ and ‘no confrontation or keeping quiet’ were highly favoured. The following lyrics of a traditional Tamang song capture this sense of quiet compromise.

Ho, le! If a beloved man is on one side of the river, hill or mountain, and if a woman is on the other, their affection, their love is called great, ancient, and most senior, if, after tucking flowers in their hair, ‘each comes half way’ (March 2002, p 12).

How far the contending parties have ‘come closer’ for mutual benefit and national development has been an important concern since the end of the civil war. The next chapter examines whether popular expectations have been fulfilled in post-conflict Nepal.
Chapter 9. Addressing Popular Expectations and Moving Ahead

9.1. Introduction

The last research question for this thesis concerned the impact of the political insurgency and violence on the lives of ordinary Nepalese. Building upon the findings of conflict experiences in the previous chapters, this chapter considers the post-conflict debate in Nepal concerning the means for advancement of the living standards and livelihoods of marginalised sections of Nepalese society. Hence, this chapter emphasises ordinary people’s expectations and the importance of grassroots experience in the process of transformation to a New Nepal.

The country in the period after the end of the Maoist-led civil war in 2006 is generally considered as New Nepal or post-conflict Nepal. For the old rulers and their associates it may be a place and time to wait and see whether they can preserve their luxury and power. For those who have gained power recently the New Nepal may possibly be seen as an opportunity to make their own lives more comfortable. Publicly, the new rulers, as the old rulers did in the past, proclaim that peace, security and economic development for marginalised groups is their prime goal.

It is important to examine whether the government’s proclamation is being delivered to Nepalese people, particularly to the marginalised groups. If the change dividend has reached ordinary people, they would trust the government because it is responsible for positive change. Yet, in their country-wide survey in Nepal, Askvik et al (2010) found that only 45 per cent of respondents trusted the central government and 46 per cent trusted parliament. However, 76 per cent trusted local governments. This indicates that the central government has failed to meet the majority’s expectations. It implies that people’s trust in government would increase if more resources were allocated to the grassroots level and authorities were devolved to local governments.

During my fieldwork, most rural people made their views clear on what the government should do, for example, ‘we do not want conflict but wish for easier conditions,
including the provision of food, clothes and shelter’ (T02, Int, male, 39 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 16 March 2009). Rural people are still struggling for their basic needs. As shown in Chapter 4, many rural people joined the Maoists to fulfil their basic needs and low socio-economic status was one of the major causes that fuelled the civil conflict. The following section considers how far the people’s demand for fulfilling basic needs has been addressed in the post-conflict Nepal.

9.2. Alleviating Poverty

Rural people expected that a post-conflict government, particularly a Maoist-led one, would offer more opportunities to increase income, hence, to develop sustainable livelihoods. The Maoist government has in fact taken some initiatives to improve the livelihoods of marginalised groups. The ‘self-employment program’ for example, has been one of the more attractive initiatives for youth in the post-conflict period. In this program, the government offered some funding to unemployed and/or marginalised young people to carry out a particular livelihood project that would be achievable in the local context. According to a recent report (OPMCM 2012a), nearly 16,000 youths benefited from the program in 2011/12. However, it may be that not all the marginalised groups have taken advantage of this scheme.

For example, it seems the Tamangs have not yet grasped the significance of the program, nor has the government taken any specific steps to increase their access to the opportunity. One Tamang woman said, ‘I learnt that the government is giving Rs 200,000 to people. I do not know what that money is for ... I will watch the first lot of people who get money and see what they do. Then I will consider if I can also have that money. We cannot stay here and not return other people’s money’ (T22, Int, female, 38 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 22 March 2009). This informant had participated in various awareness raising and self-reliance activities in her village and was reported as one of the enthusiastic and literate women in the village. She had heard about the government program but even she did not know how to access it. The communication disadvantage suffered by those rural Tamangs who cannot function well in Nepali can only be imagined.
On the other hand, one Bahun-Chhetri woman said, ‘my friend and I have jointly applied for the self-employment program. If they give us money we will establish a hotel business ... I have requested my brother to assist me. He is in the public relations office in the [Maoist] Party’ (B21, Int, female, 24 years, Bahun-Chhetri, Morang district, 09 April 2009). B21 is quite clear about the program and is confident of receiving funding because her brother is one of the office bearers in the Maoist Party. From the local accounts of T22 and B21, it seems both the Bahun-Chhetri and the Tamang informant were aware of the various government programs including the self-employment scheme, but the reluctance of the Tamang woman implies most Tamangs were unaware or wary of such government programs. Some of the Tamangs who had heard about the self-employment scheme were perhaps not interested in participating in it because it was perceived as a kind of loan. It is found that, among Tamangs, fear of the consequences of taking loans from the government often outweighs possible benefits. The linguistic disadvantage of many Tamangs is also relevant to understanding this problem.

While the self-employment program was an important post-conflict initiative to tackle persistent poverty, periodic development plans since 1956 have always focussed on poverty alleviation (NPC 2011a). For example, the ninth development plan (1997-2002) introduced a 20 year framework for reducing poverty. As a result, the number of Nepalese living below the national poverty line reduced from 42 per cent in 1996 to 31 per cent in 2003 and to 25 per cent in 2009 (NPC 2011a). However, this was not evenly distributed: the poverty reduction rate for Bahun-Chhetris in 1996-2003 was 46 per cent, Dalits 21 per cent and Hill Janajatis just 10 per cent (ADB et al 2009). Although the Tamangs are one of the Hill Janajatis, the poverty rate for Tamangs increased by 36 per cent during the same period (Das and Hatlebakk 2009). In 2003, 61 per cent of Tamangs, 46 per cent of Dalits and 18 per cent of Bahun-Chhetris were living below the national poverty line (ADB et al 2009, DFID 2006).

9.2.1. Increased Per Capita Income

Reduction in the poverty rate depends on per capita income. Per capita income was higher for males and higher for urban people (ADB et al 2009). Table 9.1 indicates that average per capita income increased for both rich and poor people. However, it is
evident from the Table 9.1a and Figure 9.1a that, in absolute terms, the rich gained much more than the poor. Further analysis revealed that the per capita income increase rate was much higher for the poor than for the rich in all years (Table 9.1b and Figure 9.1b). The higher increase rate can be attributed to the government’s pro-poor programs but the high poverty rate overall suggests that programs aimed at poverty reduction need to be scaled up and diversified.

Table 9.1: Comparison of per capita income

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>a) Income (in Rs)</th>
<th>b) Increase (in percentages)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poorest 20 per cent population</td>
<td>2,020 4,003 15,888</td>
<td>98 297 687</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Nepal</td>
<td>7,690 15,162 41,659</td>
<td>97 175 442</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richest 20 per cent population</td>
<td>19,325 40,486 94,149</td>
<td>110 133 387</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: This table and Figure 9.1 was developed from data given in NPC 2011a, p 19.

These figures indicate that effective poverty reduction and diversification of livelihoods for marginalised groups, particularly for Tamangs and Dalits, has not yet been achieved. Moreover, as discussed elsewhere in this thesis, conflict victims have not yet got fair
compensation and support. On the other side of the coin, some Maoist leaders who shifted from rural areas to the capital and other cities, like leaders from other political parties, have earned modern houses and are enjoying luxurious lives (Figure 9.2).

Figure 9.2: A visible change in post-conflict Nepal

A house of a local Maoist in a rural area as it was before the civil conflict. It seems marginalised people including many Maoist workers have remained marginalised. Significant initiatives for them have yet to begin.

Residence of the Maoist Chair in the capital which accommodated his seven family members and 70 security guards. Top Maoist leaders have shifted from jungles to modern bungalows in cities while other leaders and elites have maintained their luxuries.

Source: www.MYREPUBLICA.com, 22 January 2012.

9.2.2. Poverty Transition

Figure 9.2 exemplifies a transition from low to high socio-economic status for some Maoists: the dire status of many rural Maoists has not changed at all but senior Maoist leaders who entered the capital as new rulers of Nepal have gained unprecedented high status.

Although there has been some reduction in overall incidence of poverty, there has also been some poverty transition. Table 9.2 shows that from 1995/96 to 2003/04, more than 20 per cent of poor people moved above the national poverty line but nearly 14 per cent of non-poor people fell into poverty. Moreover, 18 per cent of people remained constantly poor and nearly 48 per cent of people maintained their non-poor status.
Table 9.2: Poverty transition matrix (in percentages)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1995/96</th>
<th>2003/04</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>Non-Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995/96</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>18.45</td>
<td>20.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Poor</td>
<td>13.59</td>
<td>47.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>32.04</td>
<td>67.96</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


It seems that many Tamangs became poorer during the civil conflict because, as mentioned above, the poverty rate for Tamangs increased from 1995/96 to 2003/04. This indicates that marginalised groups were more prone to impoverishment during the civil conflict, especially those in less fertile rural areas, such as the Tamangs.

9.2.3. Burden of Poverty

The burden of poverty is very high in Nepal. It is higher for low caste people than for high caste people, higher for women than for men, higher for rural people than for urban people, and so on. In these pairs, the first ones are generally marginalised and the latter ones are constantly privileged.

Table 9.3: Estimation of number of people living in poverty in 2003/04

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Population per cent</th>
<th>Poverty rate</th>
<th>Estimated number of poor</th>
<th>Poor share percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>24,797,059</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>7,637,494</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamangs</td>
<td>1,398,490</td>
<td>5.64</td>
<td>61.0</td>
<td>853,079</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bahun-Chhetris</td>
<td>7,659,573</td>
<td>30.89</td>
<td>18.4</td>
<td>1,409,361</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: This table was developed from data given in ADB et al 2009; CBS 2007c; and DFID 2006.
Despite the ethnic/caste difference, both sides share a significant portion of poverty. For example, Table 9.3 shows that there were nearly eight million people below the national poverty line in 2003/04. Nationally, among the poor, share of the Tamangs and the Bahun-Chhetris was 11 per cent and 18 per cent respectively. Yet, it should be noted that the population number of Bahun-Chhetris is much higher. In fact, ethnically, the percentage of the Tamang group living in poverty was 61 per cent while the percentage of Bahun-Chhetris living in poverty was only 18.4 per cent.

The poverty estimation figures presented above follow the Nepalese national standard for measuring poverty. They indicate that, despite variances among diverse groups, overall achievement has been satisfactory. However, there are other standards to measure the incidence of poverty that show a much higher burden of poverty in the Nepalese population. In 2010, 25.4 per cent of people in Nepal were poor according to the national standard of Rs 36 (about USD 50 cents) a day, but 55.1 per cent according to the World Bank international standard of US$1.25 a day (Bhusal 2012). Moreover, according to Bhusal (2012), a total of 64.7 per cent were living in poverty if the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) was applied. The MPI was developed by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) to take into account non-monetary-metric poverty estimates based on a capabilities and a rights-based approach to development. Taken together, these external measures suggest that inequality and dire poverty remains highly prevalent in Nepal.

9.3. Increasing Equality

To its credit, the government of Nepal’s most recent three year plan 2010 - 2013 (NPC 2011b) acknowledges both the achievement of poverty reduction and also that inequality has been increasing among the diverse groups. Current national programs are aimed at overall economic development; social development; infrastructure development; peace, rehabilitation and inclusive development including specific programs for marginalised groups - Dalits and Janajatis; good governance and promotion of human rights.

Since the marginalised groups no longer have to participate in the negative process of armed conflict, they have begun to improve their livelihoods. For example the Tamangs
could potentially do a great deal with livelihood opportunities if they were made available. They are certainly capable of devoting their time and effort to improving the livelihoods of their families. This is evident from the account of a rural Tamang family whose members worked for the Maoists. The informant, a Maoist Village Government Deputy-Chief, said, ‘my second son has been working in Malaysia for the last seven months. I spent around Rs 100,000 to send him there. He earns 500 Malaysian currency [per month]. My eldest son is a class ‘c’ contractor and carries out small construction projects. My youngest son is a tipper driver. He does not have a regular salary. Perhaps he earns Rs 2,000 to Rs 4,000 per month’ (T17, Int, male, 55 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 19 March 2009). During the civil war, all these productive men worked for the Maoists. T17 mentioned that he borrowed some money from local lenders to send his son abroad. This account shows that even a poor family can find some work without government support, if they are free to choose and if security prevails.

Certainly, post-conflict governments have increased the budget allocation for village level services and development. However it seems the funding has not been adequate to address the actual requirements of rural people. One of the informants said, ‘Rs 500,000 was allocated per year for a Village Development Committee (VDC) in 1996. Now it has increased to Rs 2,500,000 but this amount should not be seen as a big change because everything has become more expensive’ (B10, FGD, male, 47 years, Bahun-Chhetri, Kavre district, 21 March 2009). Moreover, despite the funding increase, there is still no guarantee of support and services to marginalised groups because local decision makers are still privileged groups, namely high-caste people and other village elites. Democratically elected local government has been absent since 2002. Hence, local decision-making is primarily taken by political party nominees. Particular nominees become more powerful and influential in important decisions if their political parties lead the state government.

To advance the socio-economic status of marginalised people in Nepal, the creation of employment and economic opportunities at the local level is one of the mandatory functions of the state (Upreti 2010b). Moreover, focus on the employment and prosperity of rural people may increase equality and contribute to national economic growth because 83 per cent of people still live in rural areas (CBS 2011, 2002). With a well-structured and functional bureaucracy operating in the countryside, both
governmental and other organisations could better deliver services which will address people’s expectations, and hence, diversify choices for rural livelihoods.

9.3.1. Reducing the Gap between Diverse Groups

It is the responsibility of any elected government to ensure equality and equity among different sections of the community. In this regard, one of the non-wealthy Bahun-Chhetri informants said, ‘the rich should be taught about equality with the poor. They should learn either by being threatened or by pressure or by their own interest. If the rich do not give some property to the poor, the government should seize the property and distribute it to the poor’ (B01, Int, male, 42 years, Bahun-Chhetri, Kavre district, 13 March 2009). This statement is significant in post-conflict Nepal. Many Tamangs, particularly those who belonged to the Maoists, also shared the same sentiment.

The rich were punished during the civil conflict for becoming richer through exploiting those of low socio-economic status and it seems that same resentment is still there. The implication is that a reduced gap between the rich and the poor will eventually result in a reduction of potential for armed violence. In the past, marginalised people continued to live in dire poverty. The gap between rich and poor increased until the point when the civil war began. It has not begun to be closed in the post-conflict period.

9.3.2. Supporting Weaker Groups

So far, successive governments have failed to convince dissatisfied people who are living on the lowest social stratum that they are working in their own interests. ‘The suffering and marginalised people have always been at the bottom of the social division’ (B09, Int, male, 42 years, Bahun-Chhetri, Kavre district, 20 March 2009). This fact has become an unavoidable truth in the Nepalese society. Another informant said,

Bahun-Chhetris grasped opportunities despite their involvement in other things. The Maoists encouraged us to take guns and to fight against the rulers ... What happened? The leaders negotiated and agreed on the top level. The people on the top always remained on the top and the people on the bottom remained on the bottom.
Uneducated people remained on the bottom. Indigenous people remained on the bottom (T32, Int, female, 50 years, Tamang, Morang district, 07 April 2009).

This informant indicates that the expectations of the Tamangs have been largely ignored in post-conflict Nepal. Another Tamang informant said, ‘I observed that people who have low economic status were more attracted towards the Maoists. However, their status is not improved yet’ (T28, Int, male, 45 years, Tamang, Morang district, 07 April 2009). Accounts of T32 and T28 claim the Tamangs in comparison to the Bahun-Chhetris could not uplift their status. Similarly, the poor rather than the rich, the uneducated rather than the educated, and indigenous people rather than non-indigenous people have lagged behind in accessing development opportunities in post-conflict Nepal. The former groups, who are weaker in many aspects of social resources than the latter, require special support to access existing and emerging opportunities to improve their livelihoods.

9.3.3. Eradicating the Poverty Trap

Some government initiatives such as formal support for livelihoods, basic services and social protection programs have led to enhanced opportunities to sustain families, particularly in rural areas. In post-conflict Nepal, more than 20 such schemes exist (Upreti et al 2012; GON 2011; Koehler 2011; UNICEF et al 2010). These include: the above mentioned self-employment scheme, public sector pension scheme, employees’ provident fund, poverty alleviation fund, senior citizens allowance, single women’s allowance, child grants, various scholarships, rural community infrastructure grants and subsistence allowance for families affected by the civil war. Most of these schemes are targeted to specific vulnerable groups, for example, the senior citizens allowance is provided to people who are 70 years old and above. In fact, the senior citizen’s allowance of Rs 500 per month is a universal pension for all elderly people. No other program has as extensive coverage as the senior citizens allowance program. It covers all castes, ethnicities, gender, class and other divisions of the society. Such government initiatives have certainly contributed to increased equality in Nepal.

Yet, there are some valid reasons to doubt access to these programs by the most needy target groups. Practices of excluding marginalised groups and favouring one’s own
political party cadres are very common in Nepal. Regarding this, one informant said, ‘the program [self-employment scheme] is only for their cadres ... We will not get anything’ (T03, Int, male, 27 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 16 March 2009). Most rural people share T03’s perception. Political party leaders blame each other for such practices but they have not changed their own behaviour. The blame-games are reported in the Nepalese media regularly. For example, towards the end of 2011, incumbent Prime Minister Dr Baburam Bhattarai blamed the United Marxist Leninist Party for distributing the self-employment scheme only to their party cadres. After three years of implementation of the program, almost all of the funding had been provided to political party cadres, particularly those affiliated with the ‘Party in Government’. Dr Bhattarai acknowledged that his Party had also followed the same path but he claimed he had initiated a stop to such biases. However, the accuracy of his claim is uncertain.

Certainly the post-conflict Maoist-led government substantially increased social protection program coverage to keep their promise of redistribution of resources to the poor in an attempt to increase equality (Bhusal 2012). Yet, the take-up of such initiatives has remained below 10 per cent of the population in Nepal (Koehler 2011). Private, non-governmental and international organisations have further implemented additional programs targeting needy and vulnerable people. There are also informal and traditional social protection programs in various locales to help community members during difficult times, for example, fire and flood (Upreti et al 2012). These programs have maintained social wellbeing in Nepal and have prevented the famines that have occurred in some very poor countries. Yet, the government and other service-providing organisations need to increase coverage and types of social protection and enabling programs to eradicate the poverty trap, not just alleviate poverty. Coverage must be expanded to increase ordinary people’s access to the programs. Otherwise, inadequate programs will be like ‘a few bones for many hungry dogs’, allowing the opportunities to be grabbed by the privileged and those who are closer to the higher power positions, as in the case of the self-employment program.

There are a number of models for challenging the poverty cycle. For example, to establish an egalitarian society and eradicate poverty, an ‘unconditional basic income’ program has been advocated by academics and thinkers like Van Parijs, Hillel Steiner, Robert Nozick and Ayn Rand (Powell 2011). In this program, every citizen is
unconditionally paid a certain amount of money as a lump sum or periodic grant, irrespective of employment, income, socio-economic status, gender, class, caste, ethnicity, race and other identities. It is believed that the unconditional basic income enables individuals to support themselves and their dependents to live reasonably well-supported human lives (Layman 2011), and that it will stimulate the domestic economy. Jordan (2010, p 16) notes that the implementation of a basic income scheme in a district in Namibia dramatically reduced poverty and child malnutrition; increased attendance at schools and health clinics; improved economic activity; and minimised crime levels. The program was implemented by a consortium of non-government organisations and provided a grant of N$100 per month for two years. Nepal might consider introducing an ‘unconditional basic income’ program by considering economic capacity, implementation feasibility and local requirements.

To eradicate the poverty trap, the government needs to first develop well coordinated plans and increase budgets. This seems quite possible because since 1990, Nepal has been receiving the highest level of Official Development Assistance (ODA) from donors in comparison to its South Asian neighbours (Upreti et al 2012). Such assistance covered 68 per cent of costs of social sector expenditure in 2008/09 and 96 per cent of the poverty alleviation fund during 2006 to 2010 (GON 2011). Furthermore, Nepal can increase national income by attracting international investments in hydro-power, industry and tourism sectors. Finally, the government could divert more of the budget to poverty eradication programs by restructuring the administration and security sectors that were scaled up to tackle the 1996-2006 civil conflict. These are just examples to show how the government could allocate the required budget to eradicate the poverty trap and sustainably enable its people to create an egalitarian and just society.

9.4. Creating a Just Society

In a socially just society, all members have access to the materials and means required to live decent and flourishing lives. As shown in the previous chapters, security problems and distributive injustice have restricted rural people’s access to basic services and economic opportunities, especially for marginalised groups including the Tamangs. Government initiatives to reduce the gap between rich and poor have, to date, not met expectations and requirements. A Tamang informant who had worked for the Maoists
said, ‘in society you have prestige if you own a lot of property. Everyone respects you. Otherwise, you are hated despite the [Maoist] Party saying everyone will be equal. Nothing good happened to me’ (T24, Int, female, 35 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 20 March 2009). Despite their promises, the Maoists are not perceived to have delivered on the Tamang’s expectations of equality. Pyakuryal and Uprety (2005) note that practices of unequal distribution of limited resources have long been the cause of suffering in Nepal.

Ensuring security for ordinary people and reasonable standards of justice could improve marginalised groups’ access to basic social services (USAID 2005). Ghani and Lockhart (2008, p 144) argue that [effective] ‘social policy turns the state from an organisation into a community of common sentiments and practice: a nation state; subjects thereby become citizens’. The inclusive nation-state can exercise human rights according to norms of mutual rights and obligation, creating a space in which every citizen has responsibilities in relation to other citizens. At this level, creation of equity and equality of opportunity drives people towards a common destiny and sense of national unity.

Figure 9.3: Situation of conflict victims in post-conflict Nepal

A Tamang woman lost her Maoist husband and possessions, but did not get support from anywhere.

A Bahun-Chhetri woman lost her Maoist husband, but received some support from individuals and institutions.

9.4.1. Demanding Special Programs

As discussed above post-conflict governments have implemented special programs for marginalised groups. These programs have increased opportunities for some. However, this has not been so for the Tamangs as an example of a marginalised ethnic group (Figure 9.3).
Due to a number of obstacles the Tamangs were unable to take advantage of limited economic opportunities during the conflict, for example, going abroad for work. Available data shows that between 1996 and 2004, remittances increased from three to 12 per cent of gross domestic product (Strickland and Byrd 2007), so overseas work certainly pays off, but the Tamangs do not take advantage of it now either. And neither are they taking up local opportunities it seems. In the same period, the average national poverty level reduced but poverty among the Tamangs increased (Das and Hatlebakk 2009). Tamangs have demanded special programs based on their indigenous rights. The government has agreed to initiate such programs. However, there has as yet been no significant progress on them.

9.4.2. Reframing Policies and Standards

The Tamangs feel they have been constantly excluded from development opportunities. The poverty rate for Tamangs is higher than for Dalits, yet scholarships and food assistance programs for Dalits have been put in place in post-conflict Nepal. The government also has special programs for the upliftment of Janajatis but in such programs privileged Janajatis such as Newars and Gurungs have dominated over the disadvantaged Tamangs. At the other end of the population group continuum, the government has special provisions for the protection of Janajatis who have only less than 1,000 population members (Upreati et al 2012; Koehler 2011; NPC 2011a), but the Tamangs are too numerous to meet that criteria, and so have been unable to access many special opportunities. Recently, the government formed the Muslim Commission (OPMCM 2012a) to fund special programs for the welfare of Nepalese Muslims. Yet, they comprise less than five per cent of the population, while the Tamang population is well over five per cent.

In regard to the situation of women in Nepal, a range of policies and programs have addressed the achievement of gender equality. In fact since 1990 the government of Nepal has introduced various policies and regulations to empower women. This has been the result of continuous advocacy and struggle for gender equality on the part of women’s groups. More recently, the Gender Equality Act 2006, the National Women’s Commission Act 2007 and the Domestic Violence (Crime and Punishment) Act 2009
have come into existence (GON 2011, 2010). Another affirmative intervention made a provision for 33 per cent of women in all state structures. However, women have not yet been able to occupy 33 per cent of positions. It was encouraging that nearly a third of women were elected to the 2008 constituent assembly election but they never occupied 33 per cent of positions in the government. The government has also attempted to bring change in Nepalese society by introducing different policies and programs to address equity issues within the family (Tamang 2011; Falch 2010). Women can now, for example, claim their right to their parental property and can confer citizenship on their children. Moreover, the government has a provision to provide a cash incentive for an inter-caste marriage particularly if a high caste person marries a Dalit person (GON 2011, 2010). However, while these changes at the macro-level and the micro-level are very important, realisation of these changes in rural areas will take a long time.

9.4.3. Exercising Human Rights

Nepal is a signatory to almost all international human rights treaties, conventions and declarations (GON 2010). For example, the death penalty was abolished in Nepal in 1998. At the national level Nepal has maintained international standards of human rights, at least in policies and papers. Post-conflict governments have been more positive than previous governments, on most issues. The convention commonly known as ILO 169 is a guiding instrument to ensuring rights of indigenous peoples. Yet, despite the 2007 ratification, Nepal is still to initiate progressive steps for its implementation. In 2009, a High Level Task Force was formed to revise the list of indigenous peoples. The Task Force suggested recognising 81 ethnic groups as indigenous peoples of Nepal, an increase from the existing list of 59 ethnic groups. However, the government has not yet taken action on the list.

New policies and programs have not been sufficient to guarantee human rights in the general sense. For example, the right to free basic health services is not accessible to many marginalised people, particularly those living in rural areas. On a recent average, births assisted by a skilled provider were 73 per cent for urban people but only 32 per cent for rural people (MOHP et al 2012). There is also a discrepancy in the maternity care support policy. The policy entitles women who deliver at a health facility to receive Rs 1,500 in the Mountains, Rs 1,000 in the Hills, and Rs 500 in the Terai. Women who
deliver at home are deprived of this support. Most women who deliver at home are poor, uneducated and mostly live in rural areas. Hence, the women who are in most need are excluded from getting support. Moreover, a health worker receives Rs 200 for attending a delivery at home but the woman who delivers gets nothing. On the other hand, civil servants are entitled to receive paid maternity care leave and a baby care allowance of Rs 5,000. So despite the good intentions of the program, it fails to address the rights of the poor and vulnerable sections of society.

With regard to the democratic representation of marginalised groups the situation is no better. For example, after the demise of the much larger constituent assembly on 27 May 2012, the government of Nepal effectively comprised eight Bahun-Chhetris (45 per cent), six Madheshis (33 per cent), and four Janajatis (22 per cent) (OPMCM 2012b). The more privileged sub-groups from the Madheshis and Janajatis are represented in the government, rather than less privileged ones. There is no representation of Tamangs or Dalits. In the current absence of democratic representation, marginalised groups are in fact completely excluded, compromising their right to participate in decision making and gain access to resources.

Regarding the violation of human rights, a Commission of Inquiry under the chair of a former Supreme Court judge was formed in 2007 to investigate violations during the decade long civil conflict. It was reported that the Commission recommended the government take action against more than 200 people including ex-King Gyanendra, political leaders and security personnel. However, consecutive governments neither implemented the recommendation nor made the report public (Linton 2010). Instead, it seems government and political parties have been protecting their cadres. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and a Commission of Inquiry on Disappearances as foreseen in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) 2006 have yet to be established, even after six years of the CPA. This scenario of inaction suggests that grave violations of human rights have been persistent in Nepal and are still not being addressed.

In short, recognition of the human rights of the poor, marginalised groups and people living in rural areas has been given lip-service only. Much more effort is required to create, promote and maintain a just society where all members can enjoy their rights.
Only a stable and peaceful state practising good governance at all levels and in all institutions can enshrine human rights and provide basic social services to its people (USAID 2005).

9.5. Confirming Inclusion or Exclusion

All groups need to feel that they are properly represented and included in the decision-making process. However, as Upreti (2010b, p 39) argues, political parties in post-conflict Nepal are ‘making the state dysfunctional by blatantly politicising the state structures, processes and procedures’. A sequence of political interventions has maintained the hegemony of male Bahun-Chhetris in the state structures, thus excluding women, Dalits, Janajatis and other minorities. Furthermore, the leaders politicise the bureaucracy and reshuffle civil servants in every change in government (Dahal 2010a); constantly eroding indicators of good governance that include autonomy, integrity, impartiality and honesty in performance. For example, due to civil servants’ poor performance, basic service delivery from the government and state institutions has not improved. As we have seen, marginalised people suffer most from this shortfall and feel even further excluded.

9.5.1. The Participatory Decision-making Process

In the past, government decisions always favoured the elites and high caste people, particularly men, because they dominated almost all decision-making institutions. Rural people observed that this situation had not changed much in post-conflict Nepal. A Tamang informant said, ‘they [Bahun-Chhetris] have their people in higher positions. They have held higher positions in villages’ (T23, Int, male, 80 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 20 March 2009). Similarly, a Bahun-Chhetri informant mentioned, ‘the crooks and evil fellows who had lots of money are holding higher positions’ (B09, Int, male, 42 years, Bahun-Chhetri, Kavre district, 20 March 2009). T23 and B09 maintain that non-elites still have no access to the decision-making process.

Benz and Papadopoulos (2006, p 2) suggest that plurality of voices in decision-making positions is one of the structural elements of a good governance system. Contrary to this wisdom, in post-conflict Nepal the political leaders negotiated critical decisions outside
the specially-created constituent assembly (ICG 2011; Tamang 2011) which represented the people. This undermined the authority and function of the constituent assembly that included both men and women from various ethnic groups, castes, classes and other dimensions of social existence, and this neglected grassroots experience and expectations. The constituent assembly no longer exists. Establishment of democratic bodies, especially elected local governments, at a grassroots level would facilitate people’s participation in the decision-making process and would contribute to improved governance in the country.

Political corruption favours the privileged and the wealthy. Unsatisfactory political practices which nurtured discrimination and corruption in the past have not disappeared in post-conflict Nepal. It is reported that many of the top leaders are engaged in corruption and other illegal activities. Despite some delays, the Supreme Court of Nepal (2011a), for the first time, declared an incumbent cabinet minister to be guilty of corruption, and recently sentenced him to 18 months in prison with a large monetary penalty for misusing national resources for personal benefit. Rural people believe that greed for personal benefit is the main reason for unstable governments and political deadlocks. At present, political leaders do not seem to show the capacity to overcome personal, party or in-group specific interests, or revive democratic institutions at village and regional levels.

9.5.2. Recognizing Diverse Groups

The diversity of Nepalese society in religion, caste, ethnicity and class poses complexities for addressing people’s expectations, particularly in eliminating discrimination. Issues of discrimination vary by type and severity for different groups. As shown in Chapters 4 and 5, different subaltern groups attempted to remove discrimination through armed conflict, with partial success. As a result of the Maoist insurgency, previously hidden discriminatory practices were widely exposed. Yet, ethnic tension still runs strong and even seems to have increased since the Maoist rhetoric made more marginalised people aware of the injustices practised against them.

For example, the Tamangs are attempting to raise their identity. They now exercise their rights by preferring Tamang political candidates. One informant said ‘we voted for the
Tamang, not for their principles’ (T05, FGD, male, 20 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 16 March 2009). Many like T05 voted for Tamang candidates despite lack of shared political ideology, indicating that ethnicity is now more important than policy. This closing of ethnic ranks has created feelings of uncertainty in the Bahun-Chhetri community. One local Bahun-Chhetri woman said, ‘the indigenous people say if you have any problems go and see their Morchaa [association] ... Where can I go? I oppose this kind of action’ (B15, Int, female, 50 years, Bahun-Chhetri, Morang district, 08 April 2009). B15 is concerned her neighbours are segregating themselves according to ethnicity. Such cases demonstrate increasing ethnic fragmentation in Nepalese society. This presents a challenge for fulfilling varied demands for representation and rights in the New Nepal.

Almost everyone who was asked agreed that the promulgation of a new constitution should bring gradual peace and development through provisions for the liberation of historically oppressed groups. For example, a Bahun-Chhetri informant said, ‘if the constitution is written, the poor and marginalised will have some sort of assistance’ (B04, Int, male, 38 years, Bahun-Chhetri, Kavre district, 14 March 2009). Widner (2008) analysed post-conflict constitutions in more than 200 countries and concluded that the endorsement of a new, more equitable constitution reduces the level of violence. It lends confidence to the view that the trust of the Nepalese people in a new constitution would be genuine. However, it has yet to be written.

9.5.3. Making Meaningful Inclusion

The meaningful inclusion of diverse identities in decision-making bodies and service delivery institutions can enhance the wellbeing of marginalised people. However, rural people have witnessed very slow progress in the delivery of basic services even though all political leaders and governments promise to improve such services, particularly health, education, drinking water, sanitation, land ownership, and employment. Summarising from the data, the general perception was that urban elites had little understanding of the situation in remote and rural areas of Nepal, or of the living conditions of marginalised people.
Despite consistent lip-service to inclusion and ethnic issues, all post-conflict governments have been led by male Bahun-Chhetris, consolidating the hegemony of male Bahun-Chhetris over three centuries. Only one Newar from a more privileged Janajati group lead a government under the rule of the King in the 1980s. No woman was ever a prime minister, nor any Tamang. Post-conflict, a small number of Tamangs did participate in government but their voices were rarely heard. Rural people, particularly the Tamangs, believe that ‘those who are in the political parties ... mislead people, misinform them and cause quarrelling’ (T09, Int, male, 30 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 17 March 2009). That is, through employing deceitful strategies, urban elite males have maintained their hegemony over all other subaltern groups.

However, since 2006 women’s representation has increased at central and local levels. Yet, as Falch (2010) confirms, the inclusion of women from marginalised groups is negligible. For example, one Bahun-Chhetri woman who participated in a local decision-making body said, ‘we are discussing how we can include women from Dalits and Janajatis’ (B15, Int, female, 50 years, Bahun-Chhetri, Morang district, 08 April 2009). It is a good start that local Bahun-Chhetris are considering the inclusion of oppressed group representatives in local decision-making bodies. Overall, meaningful inclusion of oppressed groups, however, does not seem to be anywhere close to achievement in the near future. Resentment is widespread. For example, one informant said, ‘should a parliamentarian’s son get a scholarship and a poor man’s son remain an usher? The poor have not got good opportunities for education’ (B09, Int, male, 42 years, Bahun-Chhetri, Kavre district, 20 March 2009). Gaining a scholarship increases potential for economic development by equipping the scholarship holder with necessary knowledge, skills and networks. B09 has worked as a school teacher and village government chief. Hence, his expression of discontent comes as a member of the village elite speaking on behalf of the village poor and marginalised groups. His advocacy implies that most villagers do not even recognise they are being excluded from opportunities in education and access to service institutions, and thereby, from advancing in socio-economic status.

Mutual understanding between different groups and the promotion of co-existence is vitally important for post-conflict Nepalese society. One of the fundamental elements to win people’s trust and stop destructive incidents is a truly meaningful inclusion of
excluded groups. However, as stated previously, the main political leaders of the nation are Bahun-Chhetri males and they frequently decide political matters outside the state structure (ICG 2011; Tamang 2011; Dahal 2010; Falch 2010), then implement their decisions through state institutions, ensuring the status quo. Similar decision-making practices exist at the village level too. Often, ordinary people are denied the right to information while necessary information is circulated by the powerful among their own associates and kin through formal and informal communication channels. These practices have direct implications on access to basic services and economic opportunities by the poor and marginalised groups, especially those whose command of Nepali is not strong.

9.6. Improving Knowledge

Positive social transformation can be imagined if a state develops a system of dialogue and communication between the rulers and the ruled, between political parties and their people, between indigenous and non-indigenous people, between men and women, between high caste and low caste, between the rich and the poor, and so on. However, this will not happen if the participants fail to respect each other and do not mutually strive for unity as well as equality. In the aftermath of the civil war, effective dialogue has not taken place. Interactions between diverse identities and flow of information through appropriate channels allow people to make informed decisions. However, receiving information, interpreting and applying the information in daily lives differ between individuals and different identity groups. The following two accounts show how Tamangs and Bahun-Chhetris participate in the process of acquiring knowledge.

Case 1: The Tamangs
The Tamangs are not awakening. Is there still time left to awake the Tamangs? Tamang children go to school in the beginning but they drop out quickly … When children have learnt a few words and sentences, their parents think they have learnt adequately. Then they say their eyes are opened and they have to live on their own. They say they cannot afford to pay for their children’s education (T22, Int, female, 38 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 22 March 2009).
Case 2: The Bahun-Chhetris

I am involved in groups in our community … Two women members are employed to work for the cooperative. I did not get this job because I am not educated. I am just literate … I do farming. I do not have a job. I was wondering if you had brought any program to enhance skills that can be useful to gain an income (B08, Int, female, 30 years, Bahun-Chhetri, Kavre district, 14 March 2009).

Both T22 and B08 were keen to know why data was being collected for this project. T22 was cautious about any danger in sharing her views but B08 was not concerned about it. B08 was hoping to get information about a new opportunity. This was an indication that the Tamangs were living in a more fearful condition than the Bahun-Chhetris due to the security problems they faced in the past. T22 believed the Tamangs had not grasped the need for education and other opportunities. In contrast, B08 was looking for opportunities. Many Tamangs do not grasp the economic and educational opportunities offered by the government and other institutions easily whereas the Bahun-Chhetris reach out more readily. The literacy rate tells part of the story. In 2003, the average literacy rate for five years old and above in Nepal was 49.3 per cent. However, the literacy rate for Tamangs was only 32.8 per cent while for Bahun-Chhetris it was 64.3 per cent (Das and Hatlebakk 2009).

9.6.1. Formal Education

Implementing the Education Act 2001, the government of Nepal offered free education up to grade eight to all children, irrespective of caste, ethnicity, gender, class and other divisions (NPC 2011a). Yet, despite this promotion of equality, enrolment rates in schools vary widely. In 2006, the net enrolment rate in primary school was 92.3 per cent for Bahun-Chhetris but only 80.7 per cent for Dalits and 83.2 per cent for Janajatis. The net enrolment rate was 94.5 per cent for the richest 20 per cent but only 80.6 per cent for the poorest 20 per cent of the population (UNICEF et al 2010). Similar inequality has been observed in enrolment at secondary level and in school attendance overall.
According to UNICEF et al (2010), the main reasons for not attending schools were: too expensive (23 per cent), parents did not want it (22 per cent), not willing to attend (18 per cent), and had to help at home (16 per cent). As saw in data collected for this thesis, the Tamangs placed far less emphasis on schooling than did the the Bahun-Chhetris. Furthermore, girls had to help parents at home more than boys (20 per cent versus 8 per cent). Similarly, the reason ‘parents did not want it’ was higher for girls (23.4 per cent) than for boys (18.7 per cent). Because of this cultural discrepancy, the female literacy rate in Nepal is much lower than it is for males. This has contributed to the lower socio-economic status of women, but it is also a reflection of the way women are traditionally regarded.

The government has a provision for gender mainstreaming and inclusiveness in education which has resulted in some positive impacts. Under this provision the government provides scholarships for girls from poor families and scholarships for Dalit children. However, a study found that 50 per cent of scholarship recipients were from better-off households; and in some schools scholarships were distributed to all children; so only 64 per cent of Dalits receiving scholarships were from poorer households (UNICEF et al 2010). It seems that any government program to support marginalised groups needs to be monitored, reviewed and expanded so that those in the most need will not be excluded.

9.6.2. Non-formal Education

Government and non-government organisations have launched non-formal education programs mainly targeting adult females (Figure 9.4). The aim of such programs is particularly to make women literate. However, the above-mentioned reasons for girls not attending school suggests otherwise: not only women but both parents need to be educated and perhaps counselled if female schooling rates are to improve.
9.6.3. Traditional and Informal Education

Traditional religious education institutions (for example, Gompa for Buddhists, Ashram for Hindus and Madarasha for Muslims) have long existed in various parts of Nepal. These institutions usually educate male children. The Bahun-Chhetris have a tradition of educating their children through Hindu rituals and activities that have put them ahead of other children in Nepal. However, such traditions do not exist in Tamang communities. During fieldwork for this study, three Tamang children were reported to be attending traditional education institutions. They spent four years in Nepal. Later, they went to India but their parents did not know where they were living.

The government has a provision to mainstream traditional religious education institutions so that children are not excluded from the state education system. Because of this provision, the government obtained data from 676 traditional institutions in 2009. It is reported that the net enrolment rate in traditional religious education institutions in districts was higher than the national average school enrolment rate (GON 2011). This is a good sign. However, the educational performance of these institutions is unknown and the social implications of religious education need to be carefully evaluated. This is important because there is a risk of religious tension in post-conflict Nepal.
It is notable that news media have played an important role in informing people and raising awareness, especially since 1990. Similarly, informal education, particularly awareness-raising by political parties, has been intensive in Nepal. Although the aim of the Maoist program was to gain popular support, ordinary people gained opportunities to look at their situation and learn about the reasons behind it. In Nepal, political parties with communist ideologies had a wide coverage with very active grassroots-level cadres who taught ordinary people about the oppressors and the oppressed, about the rich and the poor, about equality and inequality, and about achievement of liberation through struggle. As discussed in previous chapters, the Maoists were able to attract many poor people in their cause of the civil war. They got massive support from women, Dalits and Janajatis. Eventually, the Maoists were able to control most parts of Nepal. They got the highest vote in the 2008 election and overall, the communist parties received nearly two-thirds of the total vote (Election Commission 2008).

In short, due to formal, non-formal, traditional and informal channels of education, people's awareness has become generally higher. At least access to information has increased. Even ordinary people can now talk about rights and demand the government and service institutions to fulfil their expectations. People are generally in favour of the right to freedom but rural people are ambivalent on the topic of freedom of lifestyle, which is more of a trend today than before the war. This is evident even among the Maoists. For example, one Tamang informant observed, ‘they [Maoists] used to oppose the colouring of hair and wearing tight pants. Nowadays they are doing the same. If that was wrong, why do they do it?’ (T07, Int, male, 21 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 16 March 2009). This account indicates that while the Maoists practised conservative lifestyles while they were at war in order to attract the support of rural Nepalese living in patriarchal and conservative societies, in the present time of greater freedom they are tending towards more liberal lifestyles.

Attraction to freedom of lifestyle has raised worries in rural societies, including among the high caste people. One of the Bahun-Chhetri woman said, ‘our children are not on the right track. They drink alcohol and they gamble. Our social traditions have been lost’ (B15, FGD, female, 50 years, Bahun-Chhetri, Morang district, 08 April 2009). Because of the freedom in post-conflict Nepal, these concerns are higher than before. Some Tamangs agree with this. One Tamang informant said, ‘now Bikriti [bad things]
from the developed countries are imported into Nepal. The son of the Maoist village chief watches European dance on television’ (T01, Int, male, 48 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 15 March 2009). This informant explained that socially unacceptable behaviour such as exposing sensitive body parts and kissing scenes was being promoted in the media. Changes in lifestyle, particularly among the young generation, may or may not be harmful. However, these changes are observed as a threat to dominant Nepalese traditions and are, therefore, perceived as important. Such things have also contributed to increased tension among diverse groups.

As explained earlier, the Bahun-Chhetris have developed skills, knowledge and networks. Therefore, they have always been in the position to benefit from any change that came to Nepal. Conversely, marginalised and oppressed groups, including the Tamangs and Dalits, have taken little benefit from the changes. However, they are more politically conscious and aware than ever before, in strong part due to exposure to Maoist political propaganda. They, therefore, demand a form of ethnicity-based federalism so that they can gain the opportunity to lead and make their own futures. At first, Madheshi leaders and the Maoist Bahun-Chhetris supported ethnicity-based federalism in principle. Moreover, the indigenous representatives from the Nepali Congress Party and the United Marxist Leninist Party were ready to vote for ethnicity-based federalism, ignoring their parties’ stand against it.

Federalism threatened the Bahun-Chhetris so much that, using every means and tactic, the Bahun-Chhetri leaders of the Nepali Congress and the United Marxist Leninist parties successfully stopped the push for it. Concomitantly, along with the Bahun-Chhetri Maoist leaders, they allowed dissolution of the constituent assembly without completing the writing of the new constitution. Siera Tamang (2011) observed that although it was highly representative, the constituent assembly did not provide a fully enabling forum for the issues and concerns of excluded groups to be expressed and represented, and that the writing of the constitution at the national level by the previous constituent assembly was skewed towards accommodating the interest of the elites. In short, the wider representation of marginalised groups in the constituent assembly counted for little in the end.
9.7. Moving Forward for Development and Wellbeing for All

Transformation from conflict to a peaceful nation will largely depend upon the behaviour of political parties and their leaders in government. It is evident from the discussion in this and previous chapters that Nepalese people have clearly spoken in favour of peace in choosing the Maoists as the largest party in the constituent assembly. Nepalis want to avoid a return to war. Yet, stability, peace and development in the New Nepal can only be attained if the leadership understands and addresses the needs of all Nepalis.

Despite emerging voices from the oppressed groups, competition between powerful individual political leaders, inside and outside their party domains, ensures a lack of attention to other priorities. Male high-caste political actors dominate all major political parties. Within three and a half years of the constituent assembly election, Nepal experienced four changes of Prime Minister, all of whom were male Bahun-Chhetris. None of them remained legitimately in the post for more than nine months. Nepalese people witnessed the impotence of the political process when the constituent assembly, at one point, could not elect a Prime Minister even after 17 rounds of elections (Dahal 2010). Later, party leaders passed legislation which required that the election of a Prime Minister may not take more than two rounds of elections. Then, they were able to elect a Prime Minister in the 18th attempt. Such delayed action seriously affected the performance of the constituent assembly, government and public institutions. The new constitution is still not written and the constitutional stalemate has continued for a long time. People still hope for peace and security but the process is very slow.

9.7.1. Peace, Security and the New Constitution

Having experienced a decade of armed conflict and insecurity, rural people understand that peace is a priority. This has given rise to the prime expectation of almost everyone in post-conflict Nepal that, ‘pahilo ta shaanti hunuparyo’ [first, peace should prevail]. In the immediate aftermath of the war, people have conveyed their voice to their leaders in the constituent assembly election with the demand that the Maoists be given space in mainstream politics. Even the Tamangs who did not like the Maoists supported them,
expecting an end to armed violence. One Tamang, for example said, ‘we supported the Maoists although we did not like them … We voted for them’ (T05, FGD, male, 20 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 16 March 2009). Similarly, Bahun-Chhetris who were against the Maoists also voted for them to give them the opportunity to transform themselves into a peaceful party. One informant said, ‘my husband and I discussed it. I cast my votes for the Maoists’ (B29, Int, female, 50 years, Bahun-Chhetri, Dhankuta district, 12 April 2009). It is probable they did so for the following reasons: they wanted to end the armed insurgency forever; they desired to move freely with a feeling of security; and they wanted the state to assure their access to fair justice and development opportunities, which would best succeed in a peaceful context.

Post-conflict Nepal has succeeded in achieving and maintaining peace and security to some extent because the government has been able to manage 30,000 Maoist soldiers. More than 28,000 returned home and less than 2,000 are integrated into the national security force. The United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN) was established in 2007 to monitor arms and armed forces (Dahal 2010b). Despite this initial progress, sustainable peace has been largely compromised as political parties and the government fail to implement various agreements (INSEC 2010b), particularly the substance of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement signed between the government and the Maoists on 21 November 2006. Rural people’s accounts show that real security has not been established. For example, a Bahun-Chhetri informant said, ‘it is still uncertain whether travellers can return home. I cannot see that present conditions will be improved’ (B03, Int, male, 35 years, Bahun-Chhetri, Kavre district, 14 March 2009). The Tamangs seem to agree with the Bahun-Chhetris, ‘the current situation is not in favour of peace … The state should be able to guarantee security of its citizens’ (T01, Int, male, 48 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 15 March 2009). Like B03 and T01, most informants thought the existing situation was not moving towards peace. They emphasised the state’s responsibility to guarantee peace and security for its citizens.

Lederach (2003) maintains that peace is a dynamic process. It requires productive dialogue between state and non-state actors and institutions. This is possible through the people’s active participation in representative processes that convey their voices to their leaders. However, such communication has not yet taken place and many Nepalese are still living in uncertainty and unpredictable danger. There have been dangerous security
situations and high human casualties even since the civil war ended. During 2010, 459 people were killed; 369 were abducted; 843 were beaten; and 458 persons received threats (INSEC 2011). A full peace cannot be imagined without substantial improvements to that kind of security situation. The evidence of the first five years in post-conflict Nepal shows that consecutive governments and political parties have failed to provide the minimum desired level of security.

Nepalese people have also been demanding the completion of the writing of the constitution as soon as possible. They believe that by doing so, the nation will avoid an otherwise inevitable recurrence of the civil war. One of the informants said, ‘the people’s constitution should be written and laws should be formed so that people can decide on their rights. If the constitution and laws cannot address the people’s rights, the people will re-launch the insurrection’ (T08, Int, male, 41 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 16 March 2009). This informant emphasised not only the writing of the constitution but also its content. He further explained that the formation of non-discriminatory laws and the imposition of the rule of law could satisfy the various demands of diverse groups. It seems most Nepalese support the fundamental right of the people to raise their concerns, but without violence. Nonviolence is widely viewed as an integral part of conflict transformation that leads to achieving peace and justice through dialogue and other means of problem-solving (Dudouet 2008).

Four years of political process in the constituent assembly could not make the new constitution. Yet, the contentious issues could have been solved if leaders had practised democratic process with the formation and adoption of appropriate rules and legislations, such as the one they made to elect a prime minister. Instead, it appears that when there were disputes, they allowed their main leaders to come up with solutions rather than participating in the decision-making process and taking responsibility to work for the people who voted for them. They might have learned some lessons from other countries. South Africa for example, adopted a ‘one draft rule’ which promoted everyone’s engagement in the constitution writing process and allowed contesting parties to come to a compromise (Widner 2008). By contrast, in the Nepalese case, political parties hurried to announce their own versions of a constitution. They subsequently struggled for a long period to come to a consensus.
Many doubted whether peace will prevail in Nepal. For example, one Tamang informant said, ‘we cannot say the conflict will stop. The Forum Party in the Terai is protesting for Madheshi rights. The Tharus are also involved in their own struggle. The Tamangs, the Limbus and other ethnic groups are also raising their voices’ (T02, Int, male, 39 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 16 March 2009). He seems to anticipate sporadic ethnic conflict as groups vie for power. Another Tamang informant warned that, ‘if the new constitution is made and it is the same as that of the past, the conflict will intensify’, (T01, Int, male, 48 years, Tamang, Kavre district, 15 March 2009). As marginalised groups, the Tamangs and other Janajatis are demanding some guarantee of their rights in the new constitution. However, nowadays, even some high caste people have a concept of themselves as an ethnic group. One of the Bahun-Chhetri informants said, ‘now is not the time to give recognition to the Dalits. Instead, they have to give recognition to us. What are Dalits? Aren’t the poor called Dalits? Aren’t some Bahun-Chhetris poor?’ (B02, Int, male, 70 years, Bahun-Chhetri, Kavre district, 13 March 2009). This informant was referring to vengeful actions which targeted many high caste Bahun-Chhetris during the armed conflict even though they personally had not done anything wrong and may not have been rich. This illustrates the intensification of strident ethnic identity claims.

In post-conflict Nepal, new armed groups have emerged and are making trouble. In 2009, there were more than 109 active armed groups in the country, of which 12 were politically motivated (INSEC 2010b). These groups carry out sporadic armed violence. For example, bombs were detonated at a mosque in Biratnagar in 2008 and at a church in Lalitpur in 2009 (INSEC 2010b). In the beginning of 2012, a bomb exploded at Babarmahal in Kathmandu, killing three persons. Similarly, members of the Maoists and other politically affiliated groups, for example, the youth wings of the Maoists (Young Communist League), of the United Marxist Leninist (Youth Force), and of the Nepali Congress (Tarun Dal) have carried out armed attacks against other groups (INSEC 2010b). In addition, organised interest groups (for example, the teachers’ association and the doctors’ association) carry out protests and bandha [strikes] frequently. These groups sometimes unite for professional demands, while at other
times they align with particular political parties. Although organisers of these actions call for peaceful demonstrations, they have often ended in violence and killings. According to police records, Nepal saw 10 strikes per month in various parts of the country resulting in 125 days of *bandha* in 2010 (Adhikari 2010).

Elsewhere, the umbrella body, the Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN), which is considered to be a moderate and mainstream institution, has issued a press statement warning the government and major political parties that Janajatis will not be bound by the new constitution if it does not address their concerns (Tamang 2011). They threaten rebellion if their demands are not fulfilled. Since 2006, the number of political parties advocating for a particular ethnic group and/or region has increased greatly. Some that focus on ethnic groups are Tamsaling Nepal Rastriya Dal (advocating for a Tamang State), Dalit Janajati Party (advocating for the rights of Dalit and Janajatis) and Nepa Rastiya Party (advocating for a Newar State). The political parties that emphasise regional interests are Madhesi People’s Rights Forum, Terai Madhesh Democratic Party, and the Sadbhavana Party all of which have advocated for a Madhesh State. On the other hand, inter and intra-party factionalism appears to be growing. In 2009 one of the Ministers of the Maoist Party resigned, accusing his Party of abandoning the revolutionary agenda (ICG 2010). He formed a new political party which aimed at fulfilling that agenda. At the beginning of 2012, the Maoists further split into two parties. In addition to the increasing trend of forming new parties, factionalism has led to significant division within parties, and a challenge to the authority of many senior leaders (ICG 2011).

Overall, political development in post-conflict Nepal indicates a trend towards the continuation of political fragmentation and instability. Different political leaders have threatened the government with the taking of arms if their demands are not addressed. The emergence of numerous armed groups, the reorganisation of different political party youth wings to initiate and to counter violent activities, polarisation of indigenous politics, continued exclusion of women and ethnic groups, formation of political-religious organisations, factionalism in the main political parties, and the continued suppressive behaviour of the state have all seriously challenged the peace process (Dahal 2010b; Upreti 2010b). This fragmentation and intensification suggest that ongoing ethnically and regionally aligned armed groups, and their intermittent violent
activities, provide a complex and challenging set of issues for the New Nepal. Another potential challenge is the risk of religious brutalities. Extremist Hindus are not happy with the declaration of Nepal as a secular state. The Vishwa Hindu Mahasangh and Shiv Sena Nepal organisations accuse Christians of proselytising (ICG 2011). In short, any inappropriate political action could precipitate violent uprising by the excluded and/or dissatisfied groups, particularly the highly populous indigenous peoples and the Hindu extremists. A recurrence of civil war is possible. We have learnt from global experience that within the first ten years of the end of a conflict nearly one-third of them resumed (Bigombe et al 2000). After six years of post-war communist-led governments, this risk seems to be increasing rather than diminishing for Nepal.

9.7.3. Imagining Social Development and Wellbeing for All

Despite the volatile political environment described above, it is notable that post-conflict Nepal has seen a measure of significant change relevant to popular concerns raised during the civil conflict. For example, Nepal has been declared a Federal Democratic Republic and the 240-year old monarchy has ended. Nepal has become a secular state where all people belonging to different faith groups can in principle live without humiliation and religious discrimination, at least according to the existing constitution. The Maoists and other major political parties have been established as the only rulers in Nepal although remnants of the monarchy are still active to some extent.

At the micro level, people are more aware of the nation and of politics. For example, villagers are commonly heard to use media-disseminated buzz words, such as; bikaash [development], pragati or unnati [progress], and maukaa [opportunity]. They use these terms to compare one individual with another, to compare Maoists with non-Maoists, the country-side with the district headquarters, urban with rural, Bahun-Chhetris with Tamangs, and so on. However, it can be argued that such polarising comparisons strengthen new forms of social division, enhancing the differentiation between ‘them’ and ‘us’. The consciousness of differences raises political awareness and generates the expectation that dividends of economic activity should be equally accessible to everyone. In the post-conflict period, rural people are ready for the transformation of their societies to the point where everyone can live a decent life and attain higher living standards. However, they are still waiting.
As discussed above, post-conflict governments have introduced a number of policies and programs to improve the wellbeing of Nepalese people. In large part, this will be the outcome of the availability of, and access to, basic services that can equip marginalised groups to grasp development opportunities. However, as shown in Chapters 6 and 7, delivery of social services and diversification of livelihood opportunities was seriously compromised in the conflict-ridden environment of the insurgency. In the post-conflict period, some of these problems have been successfully addressed, but the change process has been marred by self-interest and competing claims.

In post-conflict Nepal the ways in which the old and new rulers are still negotiating behind the scenes for their own benefit is largely hidden from ordinary people. Only a few episodes have been made visible in the public domain. In December 2011 for example, the Nepalese media (see Ekantipur 2011; Republica 2011) reported that the Supreme Court of Nepal ordered the government and its regulatory bodies to stop providing illegal facilities to so-called very important persons (VIPs). Millions of rupees had been emptied from the state fund to maintain luxury for VIPs such as incumbents, previous prime ministers and other cabinet members, ex-chief judges of the Supreme Court, political party chairpersons and members of the previous kings’ families. Money was even spent in the names of deceased VIPs, particularly members of the king’s family who were massacred in 2001, and the families of two previous prime ministers who had died some years ago (Supreme Court 2011b). Such corruption and nepotism impose direct negative impacts on people’s everyday lives.

If political leaders, civil servants and other service providers maintain their self-serving practices, ordinary people’s aspirations will never be appropriately addressed. Grievances and inequality will grow among diverse groups, possibly leading to violent uprisings. Murshed and Gates (2005, p 132) found that the greater the degree of inequality the greater the intensity of civil conflict. Another study found that locally, greater inequality escalated killings by the Maoists (Nepal et al 2011).
Therefore, the degree of inequality must be reduced for Nepal to move forward peacefully. The state must increase equality, knowledge, prosperity, justice and inclusion among diverse identity groups to create a just society where everyone can live decent lives according to their choices. Figure 9.5 offers a diagrammatic presentation of this framework.

Figure 9.5: A framework for the imagination of social development and wellbeing

9.8. Conclusion

This chapter has looked at the impact of the political insurgency and violence on the lives of ordinary Nepalese, particularly the post-conflict debate in Nepal concerning advancement of the living standards and livelihoods of marginalised sections of Nepalese society. It is evident that post-conflict Nepal is passing through a period of transition. Although armed conflict officially ended in 2006, the government and political leaders are still struggling to address the hopes of the public and ensure that peace and prosperity will prevail. While the writing of the constitution has taken much longer than expected, there have been some achievements in terms of affirmative action
and peace-building. Confidence in the state has yet to develop, however, because it has failed to address popular expectations. Marginalised groups including Tamangs, women and the rural poor still do not receive development dividends with any degree of equality.

Maintaining stability, building peace and accelerating development in a post-conflict setting, seems to be particularly complex and challenging due to the ineffectiveness and corruption of political leaders who have manifested bad governance practices for so long. If good governance were to be practised in government institutions and political parties, the flow of communication and resources would see an increase in basic social services and livelihood opportunities for all, including the Tamangs, Dalits and other subaltern groups, including the poor who belong to the higher castes. Yet, the Nepalese state has to take many of the affirmative steps which are necessary to bring the desired changes and to reduce the possibility of a recurrence of armed conflict, particularly through struggles based on ethnicity and religion. Nonetheless, hope for peace, prosperity and development is still alive. The next chapter is the conclusion of this thesis.
Chapter 10. Conclusion: Learning from Rural People’s Lived Experiences

10.1. Introduction

Following the research plan, this thesis has explored some experiences of life for Nepalese people in respect of the recent political insurgency in Nepal, as well as assessing the impact. The thesis focused on the experiences of a marginalised group (the Tamangs) and a privileged group (the Bahun-Chhetris) in selected rural areas of Nepal during the 1996 to 2006 civil war. The selected areas saw a high level of fighting during the Maoist insurrection. The research project was an extensive qualitative study carried out at ground level to answer the following questions:

1) What have been the impacts of the conflict on health, education, and economic development perspectives in different Nepalese communities?

2) How have community members of discrete groups occupying different socio-economic and ethnic/caste positions experienced the civil conflict?

3) What strategies have been developed to cope with the violence and the deprivation at individual, family and institutional levels?

4) What have been the experiences of geographically isolated people in the armed civil conflict?

5) How are the experiences of civil conflict and violence embedded in gender, caste and social dynamics of local communities?

6) How has the political insurgency and violence impacted on and perhaps transformed the lives of ordinary Nepalese?

In the following sections, I firstly summarise findings of the study to demonstrate that the above-mentioned questions have been addressed. Then, I explain the limitations of
the findings. Finally, I present a discussion of the social transformation and the future implications of the study.

10.2. Summary of the Findings

The findings presented in this thesis show the complexity of experiences of the civil conflict in Nepal since 1996. The rural people studied in the selected areas perceived the main causes of the conflict to be:

a) pre-existing practices of poor governance compounded by distributive injustice  
b) low socio-economic status prevalent in rural areas  
c) pervasive discrimination spread over various dimensions of their lives

The causes of the conflict were demonstrated to be deep-rooted, encompassing differences in gender, caste, ethnicity, socio-economic class, religion, politics, geography and other aspects of diversity. One example of this was that access to public services and diverse livelihood opportunities was more restricted for Tamangs than for Bahun-Chhetris.

The armed conflict created a difficult security situation which challenged the lives and livelihoods of civilians, particularly those living in rural areas. Over time, rural dwellers developed coping strategies based on their lived experience. The conflict impacted on everyone and on every sector, including health and education, both directly and indirectly. Yet, marginalised groups such as the Tamangs were identified as facing particularly trying challenges in dealing with the conditions of war.

Although the civil war officially ended in 2006, popular expectations have remained largely unfulfilled due to: continued security difficulties, delayed progress on peace building and lack of significant initiatives by the government and political parties. Data suggest that the after-effects of the armed conflict have been more severe for the marginalised groups due to the lack of capital, fewer resources and less capacity to recover from the damage. Findings such as this are rarely reported locally because autocratic and exclusionary regimes have been suppressing the voices of marginalised groups for a long time, and this continues to some extent in the New Nepal. In that
sense this thesis takes its place in the field of subaltern studies. Researched and written by a member of the Tamang ethnic group who has deep insights into the lives of rural and indigenous people, this study has not only focused on the experiences of the most marginalised groups in Nepal, but has allowed those voices to speak.

10.2.1. Impacts of the Conflict on Health, Education, and Economic Development

As shown in Chapters 6 and 7, the impact of the conflict on health, education and economic development is complex, intertwined and likely to be long lasting. The direct health impacts of the conflict on people were killings, disappearances and disabilities which often left victimised families in a state of psychological distress or mental disorder. Reports show that the civil conflict killed more Bahun-Chhetris than other ethnic groups. From an ethnic point of view, the Maoists targeted more Bahun-Chhetris than Tamangs because the Bahun-Chhetris held most political, administrative, public and other important positions. They were considered to be the representatives of the oppressive state living all over Nepal. Informant narratives suggest that this was the main reason behind more casualties among the Bahun-Chhetris. However, analysis of deaths in the research districts shows that the conflict proportionately killed more Tamangs. It was evident from the fieldwork that government forces targeted more Tamangs than Bahun-Chhetris in the traditional Tamang areas because Tamangs were perceived to be Maoists. They lacked a dependable network with the state agencies and, therefore, had fewer points of negotiation. They also had fewer resources to enable escape from local fighting. Their daily lives and livelihoods were in danger.

However, whether they were Tamangs or Bahun-Chhetris, the significant outcome was immediate and ongoing suffering for both groups. Due to the impact on health, the ability of individuals to continue with education and income generation was reduced and participation levels in such activities were altered. The resulting loss of income and poor educational performance means that families in those rural areas that saw intense fighting face ongoing economic difficulties, which further affect their capabilities in accessing health services, attaining a good education and availing themselves of economic opportunities.
The conflict reduced the availability of service institutions and created extra difficulties by imposing a lower level of equipment, commodities and staffing. Many health clinics and village government buildings were destroyed, including some schools. In their battle for control of key rural areas, both the Maoists and government security forces targeted and attacked health workers, school teachers, government staff members and entrepreneurs in rural areas in and out of office hours. The impact of such brutal actions was not limited to these service providers but greatly affected rural consumers. The Tamangs and other marginalised groups were even more restrained from accessing services because they could not afford to seek required services in other places. Evidence from this study indicates that the civil war situation put an extra burden on rural families in the key areas of health, education and economic sustainability.

Poor families, women and children, and most Tamangs were restricted to their villages by lack of resources and forced to use alternatives, for example traditional healers. In addition, the conflict interrupted the traditional money-lending system and reduced the capacity of those in marginalised positions to buy food and to access education and health services. At the other end of the scale, well-off families, particularly those from a high caste background, were able to bypass this cycle using money resources and existing family and administrative networks. Findings in the fieldsites showed they were often able to migrate to the capital or relatively safe urban areas where they were able to send their children to better schools, access health services from better equipped and more highly trained providers, and take up new economic opportunities. If they aligned themselves with the Maoists they also held higher positions and enjoyed better facilities. However, marginalised group members who aligned themselves with the Maoists fought in the frontline and put their lives at risk. It seems that since the cessation of the conflict, some Tamangs who were former Maoist followers have been forced into poor choices and have suffered negative indirect effects to the extent that their burden is the same, or has even become worse than before.

10.2.2. Results of the Conflict with Regard to Socio-economic and Ethnic/Caste Positions

The stories from rural people in this thesis clearly demonstrate that the Maoists achieved swift and massive support because almost all of those in rural areas were living under socio-economic stress. Ongoing poor governance and injustice allowed
Maoist leaders to exploit emotions and to use rural inhabitants in the war against their opponents. The Maoist leaders looked on other political party leaders and rulers as their opponents but maintained their hegemony over the less educated poor people, including the Tamangs. Informant accounts illustrate that the poor who worked for the Maoists were mobilised to collect money from villagers, job holders and local businessmen; to loot banks and rural rich households; and to search for other potential funding sources by means of threat, abduction and the use of arms. By such practices the Maoists maintained hegemony over the marginalised groups. The post-conflict situation has continued to place Tamangs and other marginalised groups in a subaltern position, despite the fact that they were significant fundraisers and producers for the Maoist-led war.

At the household level, it is evident that the armed conflict resulted in a greater level of suffering for families with lower socio-economic status. According to fieldwork findings, there were very few rural households in these areas where the Maoists did not stay or eat at some time. Many rural families worked for the Maoists without wages. However, the rich families were exempted from such work if they donated money. Many families lost their loved ones either at work or in the battlefields. Many of the dependents of those killed had never received compensation from the government. Although the conflict affected people belonging to every caste and ethnic group, this study found that in general, the daily burden of hardship and suffering was heavier for the Tamangs than it was for the Bahun-Chhetris, even though the number of casualties was higher among Bahun-Chhetris. On the other hand very poor Bahun-Chhetris also passed through experiences similar to those of the majority Tamangs. In general, it seems Tamangs joined the Maoists to fulfil their daily needs due to extreme poverty, while many Bahun-Chhetris joined to gain advantages and opportunities. A few Tamangs took positions as junior leaders. This opportunity developed hope and confidence among Tamangs for social transformation. This might be the reason that most Tamangs were still supporters of the Maoists in the post-conflict period whereas most Bahun-Chhetris in the fieldwork areas favoured other political parties. It seems the conflict maintained the subaltern position of the Tamangs overall but also contributed to raising awareness about their ethnic identity.
10.2.3. Strategies to Cope with the Violence and Deprivation

Conflict survival strategies were very important because they were developed over time, and based on lived experience, since rural people went through some very dangerous situations. The conflict survival or coping strategies were analysed at the individual, family and community levels. Strategies developed to protect individuals were found to be opportunistic. Depending upon a situation they could be ‘for’ or ‘against’ or ‘neutral’ with regard to the contending parties in the conflict. Similarly, strategies aimed to protect family members mostly avoided any need for confrontation with armed groups. Community level coping strategies appeared to be ‘against’ the contending parties, but were often covert so that brutality and intimidation in the community could be avoided. There were some insurgents who were able to infiltrate the villages and attract many people to participate on the Maoist side in the civil war. As those individuals were able to persuade or intimidate selected individuals and families, it appeared that the majority of community members were participating in the civil conflict. In fact, they resisted the violence and insecurity covertly, often demonstrating that ‘silence’ was the simplest and best coping strategy during difficult security situations.

Differences were visible between strategies employed by Tamangs and Bahun-Chhetris. For example, if a Tamang migrated from a conflict-ridden place it was primarily to avoid immediate danger. If a Bahun-Chhetri migrated, the aim was often to explore better opportunities while at the same time avoiding the existing danger. For the Tamangs, the pervasive social, economic and political exclusion imposed over two and a half centuries limited the meaning and scope of migration and other potential coping strategies.

10.2.4. Geographic Isolation and the Armed Civil Conflict

In the fieldwork districts, usually the district centre and nearby areas accessible by road were reported to be under the control of the government. Remote areas inaccessible by road were effectively under the control of the Maoists. People living in such areas were under the constant threat of violence. During the conflict, ordinary people’s movements in rural areas were highly restricted. They were forced to feed and take care of the
Maoists. The most marginalised people suffered from an increased disadvantage because they were completely isolated from reduced state services. The limited services and reduced resources, including medicines that were supplied to remote areas, were consumed by the Maoists and a few village elites. Protecting ordinary people’s lives and providing services to them was of low priority. As most Tamangs were living in remote areas, they were greatly affected. Government security forces searched for the Maoists but if they could not find them they arrested and tortured ordinary innocent people who were sometimes also victims of the Maoists.

10.2.5. Gender, Caste and Social Dynamics of the Armed Civil Conflict

Although almost all the leaders and the majority of the participants in the conflict were men, many women, particularly Dalits, Tamangs and members of other marginalised groups, were actively involved in the war. Women fought and sometimes even led the war against the government and proved that they were the equal of their male counterparts. They established a new identity for female combatants and convinced the state authorities to recruit women into the military. However, the negative impact of the conflict was heavier on women in the everyday sphere than on men. Most of the men of a productive age group either moved to a safer destination or joined the Maoists, leaving women, children and elderly members in the rural villages. Girls assisted at home while boys continued to attend school. Tamang women, whether they were with the Maoists or abandoned at home, rarely received support when they required it. Most Bahun-Chhetri women received some sort of support because of their higher status, both in the pre-existing structures and in the Maoist organisations.

The decade-long armed conflict in Nepal can be seen as fratricide because Nepalis killed other Nepalis; Tamangs killed other Tamangs; Bahun-Chhetris killed other Bahun-Chhetris; and so on. In most cases, the Maoists mobilised Tamangs to target other Tamangs, and Bahun-Chhetris to target other Bahun-Chhetris because of insider knowledge. Challenging the Maoist claim that the civil war was for the liberation of oppressed people, the armed struggle actually caused further suffering for many people.

In the post-conflict period since 2006, although hope for a better life is still alive, and some gains have been made, the government and political parties are yet to take
significant initiatives for long term peace, or for the betterment of any of the marginalised groups, including those in rural areas. Identity claims and tensions between ethnic, religious and regional groups have intensified during the post-conflict period, particularly since a new constitution ensuring rights and representation has yet to be written. It seems political leaders still look after their vested interests while inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic violence and killing continue. If the civil unrest situation worsens and political evasion, collusion and corruption continue, it might trigger a recurrence of the civil war or a new dictator might emerge with the intention of eliminating opposing voices.

In the post-conflict period women have achieved some milestones including one third of the seats in the constituent assembly. However, the assembly has since been dissolved. Women have not made gains in cabinet seats, nor taken important positions in political parties. The achievements for women so far, while encouraging, are not commensurate with the suffering through which they have passed.

10.3. Limitations of the Findings

The findings presented in this study are based on people’s lived experiences in rural Nepal where civil war fighting was particularly intense. They represent some voices of geographically isolated people who were historically disadvantaged due to a prevailing centrist approach to administration and development controlled by elites living in urban Kathmandu. In that sense, the findings of this thesis will resound with the experiences of many rural populations that have long been subordinated by centrist domination from the capital, and then face local civil violence. However, any generalisation of the findings should be considered cautiously due to the differences in meaning of experience from place to place and individual to individual.

This thesis set out to make a comparison between the experiences of Tamangs and Bahun-Chhetris during the civil war in the three selected districts. Although some data was assembled about the situation of Dalits and other Janajatis this was only a small quantity, and no significant findings have been made about their experiences. While the critical discussion has often made reference to marginalised people in general, specific
and detailed analysis has been limited to data from Tamangs and Bahun-Chhetris in the three districts.

Since the data collected for this study reflects the experiences of adult informants aged 18 years and over, the experiences of children are not directly represented. Moreover, as this study does not involve an in-depth gendered analysis, gendered interpretations presented in this thesis should also be taken cautiously. The author has attempted to capture the original meaning of the experiences and has used informant quotes wherever they were relevant. In the end, the interpretations are those of the author and are expressed according to the author’s own ‘insider’ understanding, informed by the review of literature.

10.4. Social Transformation and Future Implications of the Study

An important implication of this study is that in post-conflict Nepal, all the people, but particularly high caste and elites, need to be ready to adopt new changes if they expect to see peace and social transformation. At the macro-level, Nepal became a new republic at the beginning of the 21st century and the Maoists remain the major mainstream political party. Yet, despite these changes from the past, the Nepalese state has not yet taken many affirmative steps to bring about changes desired by the people at the micro-level, nor to reduce the possibility of a recurrence of armed conflicts. It seems the elites, new and old, are hanging onto power and privilege.

Progress on conflict transformation and peace-building has been very slow. The 601-member constituent assembly terminated after four years on 27 May 2012 without promulgating a new constitution. Since then uncertainty has reigned in the Nepalese political arena with no apparent way forward. Now anything at anytime can happen if an ambitious leader with a strong greed for political power emerged. This is certainly possible because Nepalese political history has witnessed such a situation in the past. For example, the introduction of a unitary Panchayat system in 1960 was a product of a failure of political leaders to work for the betterment of people through a newly gained multi-party system in 1951. The civil war itself can be seen as a consequence of a similar situation when the governing political leaders failed to address popular expectations and did not listen to the then small communist party. In this context, the
following sections suggest some important implications of this study for three key groups.

10.4.1. For Rural People, Marginalised Groups and Social Organisations

Many ordinary Nepalis turned to the Maoists thinking that they could be the way to liberation. In the beginning of the civil conflict, some activities appeared to offer hope, but the hope gradually faded away. Subsequently, the few initiatives taken by the Maoist government have been too little to bring about change for rural people and marginalised groups. The ordinary rural people have begun to realise that the Maoists used them as a stepping stone to attain the power centre in the capital. As a result, dissatisfied Maoist leaders rebelled against the main leadership. One breakaway group was led by a Madheshi leader and another group by a Janajati leader. By August 2012, the Maoist party had split into three factions. The implications of this study suggest that the possibility of a further split cannot be ignored because the post-conflict expectations of the people, especially marginalised groups, have not been engaged. The most marginalised groups are still waiting for a fully enabling environment where they can advance and use their capacity.

Knowledge and skills develop through lived experience nurtured by formal education, organised teamwork and continuous effort. Most Tamangs, other marginalised groups, poor Bahun-Chhetris and women of all ethnicities need to establish and maintain these things if they want to achieve better lives. They must improve their knowledge by searching for information, understanding the information, acquiring required skills and applying information and skills appropriately. However, they cannot move ahead to develop these capabilities without institutional support provided by the state. Furthermore, these capabilities are best developed through a peaceful, not a violent environment. Peaceful means of change are much better than violent conflicts.

10.4.2. For Government, Privileged Groups and Service Providers

An important implication of this study is that a future civil war should be avoided at all costs. The amount of damage produced by armed conflict is huge and sometimes irreversible. Civil war destroys property and kills many capable individuals from all
groups. The war may serve to create an even more exploitative environment as vacant positions are taken over by comparatively less capable individuals or by people of low character. Disappointed expectations fuel civil violence. At the same time, gender discrimination and violence against women and children has not decreased and remains unreported and under-reported. These forms of violence negatively affect the viability of the state and its economy.

As this thesis shows, the most important prerequisites for the peaceful transformation of a society are: rule of law, government by democratic norms, practice of good governance, and competitive economic development. It is necessary to have appropriate laws, regulations and policies that ensure a place for everyone, and long-term plans for their effective implementation, giving first priority to marginalised groups who have long been disadvantaged. The primary focus of these prerequisites is the valuing of human life. If a government tortures and kills its people instead of addressing their demands appropriately, some people will lead and many others will join a rebellion against the repression. This is what happened in the recent past in Nepal.

The implication is that the government, privileged groups and other service providers must urgently consider equity and equality at all levels, for all people, including Tamangs, other Janajatis, Dalits, Madheshis, poor Bahun-Chhetris and other marginalised groups as well as women from all ethnicities. Here, equality refers to the enjoyment of equal rights, unrestricted and fair access to opportunities, and impartial treatment ‘for and by’ all members in all spheres of life. Mechanisms of equity and equality should be in place in all interventions that aim to increase prosperity by alleviating poverty and enhance economic development. Governments need to: increase access to justice by running fair and prompt judiciary bodies; ensure meaningful inclusion of diverse identities by democratic and affirmative processes; and improve ordinary people’s knowledge by providing multiple ways of communication and enabling their participation in educational programs.

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to provide specific detailed recommendations as to precisely how the government and other organisations can guarantee equality and optimise the protection of the people of Nepal. One point that can be made is that it is nearly impossible for marginalised groups to claim rights if elected members do not
take up their proper responsibilities. This is exactly what happened in the case of the dissolved constituent assembly. Representatives of the marginalised groups demanded an ethnicity-based federalism. The proposed federalism would have curtailed power at the centre and given more rights to marginalised ethnic/caste groups. If the proposal had been passed, the main leaders at the centre would have lost their uncontrolled access to national resources, and there would have been more autonomy for marginalised groups within the proposed states of the federation. Because of this threat to the main leaders at the centre, the proposal to divide Nepal into federal states did not enter the constituent assembly meeting for discussion and voting. Since the constituent assembly has since been dissolved, the option of deciding on a form of federalism through representative democratic process seems to have also disappeared.

However, the tide of political development in Nepal suggests that federalism with ethnic identity, devolution and decentralisation of authority, and self-determination by local people seems unavoidable at some point in the future. In principle, most political parties have agreed to make federal states based on ‘strength and identity’, yet there is a lack of consensus about how this might be practically achieved. Based on the findings of this thesis, all parties would need to reach agreement on some fundamental premises.

Firstly, there should be proportional representation of diverse ethnic groups living in each state in the federation. The election of the head of the state government must take place through a fair and transparent democratic process. If particular ethnic group members are allowed to head the new state governments without following democratic process, this would implicitly exclude some groups from heading governments. The new system would not then be much different from the old system, inviting multiple forms of conflict.

Secondly, a new political system of federalism must guarantee everyone’s rights, not only those of Nepalis but also foreigners who enter Nepal and her federal states lawfully. This provision would not only provide rights for immigrants but recognise the rights of nearly two million Nepalis living abroad. Once a balanced ethnic and gender representation has been established, there should be provision for a certain number of seats in the state governments that are freely contested and open to all comers in order to promote any capable and educated persons who wish to enter politics.
Thirdly, in any future system of governance it is most important that inclusionary practices are promoted and barriers of division based on social status, class, caste, ethnicity, gender, religion, language and other determinants of differentiation and discrimination are systematically and gradually lessened. Proportional representation, democratic practice, meaningful inclusion, and encouragement for best performance need to be ensured in all state associated institutions. At best, federalism will not reduce rights of the privileged people but it will provide equal rights to the marginalised people, enabling the development and wellbeing of the community as a whole.

Finally, there is the question of land. A persistent issue in Nepal since the 1950s has been redistribution of land. Political reform is needed here too. Political leaders have been using the slogan ‘land for the tillers’ for a long time. Interactions during fieldwork revealed that in the post-conflict period, most farmers expected to have equal share of lands, particularly in the southern plain which is more fertile. In fact, this is a false belief because it cannot practically happen. Even farmers in the same village will not agree to give any of their land to a neighbour who does not have a piece of land. When politicians get opportunities to lead government, they receive huge donations and other benefits from landlords. The leaders then change the words of the slogan. They say ‘more land rights to farmers to increase productivity of their lands’. This is the vicious cycle on the issue of land redistribution that has been running over a half century.

If the government and political leaders really want to address the land issue they must come up with a new vision and approach. They must not exploit ordinary people with false promises to give ‘land to the tiller’, invoking an ideal of subsistence farming. Instead, they should take significant initiatives to increase economic opportunities for marginalised groups. The huge landholdings of landlords can be used for industrial farming and other development purposes that benefit both the landlords and the farmers. Landlords who are not taking charge of their lands for increased productivity should give their lands to the state, and the state should buy these lands with minimal compensation. The state should develop a mechanism to then provide such land to capable entrepreneurs who can use the land to contribute to the national economy and benefit poor farmers who will need to be equipped with necessary education and skills.
In summary, the analysis in this thesis of the experiences of ordinary rural people in a people’s war may be useful for those living in other countries who face a similar situation, particularly in the context of civil war or international war that injures and kills people. As recent uprisings in Arab countries and the continuous war in Afghanistan remind us, few of us on the planet are far away from the terror of war and its casualties.

10.4.3. For Researchers and other Knowledge Producers

As with any social science study, this thesis has addressed some important research questions and generated additional subjects for further study. In so doing, it has attempted to make a significant contribution in the field of civil conflict studies from a sociological perspective of the subaltern viewpoint. In particular, this thesis has emphasised the importance of a study that compares experiences of armed conflict between privileged and marginalised groups in a developing country with a long history of inequality and civil conflict.

Analysis of the experiences of two major ethnic groups in Nepal has suggested that many experiences during the war were similar for most Nepalese people in contested remote rural districts, but there were some significantly different experiences too. As this was a qualitative study, a quantitative study to complement this study with a continued focus on Tamangs and Bahun-Chhetris could be carried out. The findings presented in this thesis identify some of the reasons for the privileged Bahun-Chhetri position in society compared to that of the Tamangs, and indicate there are many factors related to holding these positions of privilege. It was indicated that there are some positive and productive cultural practices which make Bahun-Chhetris more capable than Tamangs and other marginalised groups in taking up opportunities. It would be informative to further inquire what these more productive cultural practices are, and how they affect rural people’s lives and livelihoods.

Throughout this thesis, I have used the terms ‘caste’ and ‘ethnic’ group interchangeably. It is indicative that sooner rather than later in Nepal, the use of the term ‘ethnic’ will become more popular than the term ‘caste’. The terms caste, ethnic group and indigenous people are being re-defined, opening the way for researchers to investigate
their new meanings. The scope of indigenous, socio-cultural, and political studies has increased because of political awareness among the previously inactive or less active ethnic groups. Future studies may contribute to understanding the threat or progress of inter-ethnic and inter-religious conflict in the New Nepal.

10.5. Conclusion

Although people may fight for a variety of reasons, armed civil conflicts are destructive for human beings and their possessions. The armed conflicts kill both armed fighters and unarmed civilians, but unarmed civilians suffer greatly. The suffering continues for a long time for all those touched by the conflict, but particularly for marginalised groups. While privileged groups should ideally participate in conflict prevention and peacekeeping interventions, it would also be wise for marginalised groups to find and adopt alternatives to armed rebellion as a means of seeking advancement.

The thesis has highlighted some of the important causes and consequences of armed civil conflict based on people’s lived experiences in rural Nepal. The conflict has not stopped completely, nor is it guaranteed that there will be no more conflict. Yet, despite many uncertainties, Nepalese people have started to experience peace to some extent, even though it would seem that so far not much has changed. Nonetheless, the hope of peace and future prosperity is still alive in Nepal.
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Appendix I: Focus Group Discussion Guide

Experiences of Civil Conflict in Nepal

Place: ………………………… Date: ………………………………….

[A] Rapport Building

A.1. Introduction
Thank you all for accepting our invitation and coming for discussion. The objective of today’s discussion is to share your experiences about the ‘people’s war’ or the ‘civil conflict’ that took place over the last decade so that knowledge on the conflict will be advanced to contribute to develop our communities and nation. You can talk about both happiness and sorrows; you can ask questions and give comments; and you are encouraged to give your point of view freely. The discussion will continue for up to two hours. We do not want to miss any of your valuable comments. Hence, we will record today’s discussion. Let’s start from our introduction. My name is Asha Lal Tamang; I was born in Kavre district 36 years ago; and currently, I am studying in Australia. Please tell me your name and ethnicity; how old are you; where is your house; and what do you do?

Participants:

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Before starting discussion, let’s set some ground rules so that everyone will have an opportunity to express his/her view freely and respectfully.

A.2. Ground Rules:
1. Listen to others and speak turn by turn
2. If you want to interrupt, please raise your hand
3. If you wish to leave the room, please do so quietly

[B] Discussion

**Theme 1:** People’s involvement in and experiences of the armed civil conflict

a. In terms of people’s movement and people’s war, please tell us what you saw in your village and what you did during specific situations.

b. Probes:
   i. Can you please elaborate more?
   ii. Is there any evidence?
   iii. What other people (participants) think about her/his statement?
   iv. Anything additional?

**Theme 2:** Socio-economic status, survival strategies and gender roles

a. During the difficult situations, you might have taken some specific steps for your survival and security. Please share those actions with us.

b. Probes:
   i. Umm.. It’s very challenging!
   ii. Can you please describe more?
   iii. What did encourage or motivate you?
   iv. Any support or objection by other people?
   v. Anything additional?

**Theme 3:** Access to basic social services and opportunity to express opinions

a. After 1996 when the people’s war started, please analyse the situation of basic social services namely health and education, and livelihood opportunities in your village. You can tell what went well; what was improved and what deteriorated.
b. Probes:
   i. Can you please tell it in detail?
   ii. Is there any specific examples?
   iii. Any alternatives?
   iv. Any support from someone or any organisation?
   v. Anything additional?

**Theme 4: Social change and overall impact of the conflict**

a. Let’s try to conclude from your experiences. What do you see as positive and negative changes or effects of the people’s war?

b. Probes:
   i. Hmm Hmm, that’s interesting. Please elaborate.
   ii. Please tell more.
   iii. Hmm Hmm, that’s not really clear. Please explain.
   iv. What else? Is that all?
   v. Any final words?

--------------------------“Thank you all for your active participation”--------------------------

[C] Researcher’s Reflection

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Appendix II: In-Depth Interview Schedule

Experiences of Civil Conflict in Nepal

Place: ……………………… Date: ……………………………………

Informant

| Ethnicity: ……………………… | Age/Sex: …………………………………… |
| Education: ……………………… | Occupation: ……………………………… |
| Contact address: ………………… |

My name is Asha Lal Tamang. I am from Kavre district and currently, I am studying in Australia. I would like to know your experiences related to the political insurgencies in your village over the last decade that affected you and your family. I would like to record our discussion so that any of your valuable points will not be missed.

Theme 1: People’s involvement in and experiences of the armed civil conflict

1. Please tell me something related to the insurgencies that you always remember or you cannot forget (e.g. you were trapped somewhere during the war; your family member was injured because of the war; you had to feed rebels; etc).

2. Can you remember any moment that made you the happiest or the unhappiest during the difficult security situation? Would you please explain?

3. You or your family might have experienced difficult situations because of the armed civil conflict. Can you please tell me what they were?

Theme 2: Socio-economic status, survival strategies and gender roles

4. During the difficult security situations, what did you do for you and your family’s survival? (e.g. take help from other people, change specific
roles of men and women, joined the Maoists, obtain security from the government, etc.) Can you elaborate please?

5. How did your economic status help you to face the difficult situations? (e.g. donation, send your family members to a safer place, etc.) OR
Did the economic status endanger you and your family? Please explain.

6. Similarly, how did your social position (e.g. as a father/mother, holder of a public position, being male or female, ethnicity, etc.) help you to face the difficult situations? OR
Did the social position you held endanger you and your family? Please explain.

**Theme 3:** Access to basic social services and opportunity to express opinions

7. Can you tell me what kind of basic social services you used during last ten years? (e.g. health services, schooling of your children, drinking water, food stuffs, local market, etc.) Please explain.

8. If sometimes you did not use basic social services, can you explain to me why did you not use them? (e.g. unavailable, inaccessible, expensive, scared to express your opinion, etc.)

9. When you faced difficulty in accessing the basic social services, who did you ask for help? (e.g. the Maoists, government officials, neighbours, non-government organisations, etc.)? Can you explain please why?

**Theme 4:** Social change and overall impact of the conflict

10. Finally, please tell me in a few words what has changed in your life and family because of the armed civil conflict?

11. What role have your neighbours and community played in social changes occurring in Nepal now; or in the past?

12. In your opinion, what is the overall effect of an armed movement bringing changes in society/community? Please explain based on your experiences.

---------------------------------------------Thank you very much for your time and help.----------------------

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Appendix III: Certificate of Approval of the Research Protocol

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE
Certificate of Approval

| Applicant: (first named in application) | Professor Pamela Nilan |
| Co-Investigators / Research Students: | Doctor Alexander Broom, Mr Asha Lal Tamang |
| Protocol: | Experiences of Civil Conflict in Nepal |

In approving this protocol, the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) is of the opinion that the project complies with the provisions contained in the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research, 2007*, and the requirements within this University relating to human research.

**Note:** Approval is granted subject to the requirements set out in the accompanying document *Approval to Conduct Human Research*, and any additional comments or conditions noted below.

### Details of Approval

| HREC Approval No: | H-2008-0388 |
| Date of Initial Approval: | 20-Jan-2009 |

**Approval**

Approval will remain valid subject to the submission, and satisfactory assessment, of annual progress reports. If the approval of an External HREC has been "noted" the approval period is as determined by that HREC.

**Progress reports due:** Annually.

If the approval of an External HREC has been "noted", the reporting period is as determined by that HREC.

### Approval Details

**Initial Application**

11-Feb-2009

Approved

The Committee ratified the approval granted by the Deputy Chair on 20 January 2009 under the provisions for expedited review.

**Authorised Certificate held in Research Services**

Professor Allyson Holbrook
Chair, Human Research Ethics Committee