

Need of Sherpa Autonomous Province in Federal Nepal

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Introduction

We find that people of different ethnicities and linguistic, religious and cultural communities have inhabited Nepal since ancient period. Sherpa community is one among these different ethnic communities with a distinct identity of its own that has geographically inhabited in dense settlements in the northern mountainous region of Nepal. The Sherpas are the followers of Buddhism and a peace-loving people who have their distinct language, culture, lifestyle and a long historical tradition in which the whole country can take pride in.

It is certain that the new Constitution will adopt a federal and inclusive model and the country will become a federal state from a unitary, centralized system of governance. As such this framework has also been incorporated in the draft constitution. The State Restructuring Committee has considered identity and capability as the basis for materializing the federalism which also includes population, geography, historical continuity and economic feasibility. Topics like economic interrelations, status and viability of infrastructure development, availability of natural resources and administrative feasibility have been included as the basis of capability.

A host of basis of identity and capacity regarding the Sherpa community can be presented in support of the formation of an independent, autonomous and strong Sherpa state based on identity and capability.

Basis for the Identity and Capability of the Sherpa Autonomous Region

1. A shared extensive geographical area continuously settled by the Sherpa people for centuries and a common lifestyle as mentioned above.
2. A population of more than 500,000 if population is to be taken as the basis for the formation of federal state.
3. Continuity in the settlement of Sherpas in this region since ancient period.
4. Unique linguistic, religious and cultural identity.
5. Sherpa majority in the north-east mountainous region of Nepal.
6. World-famous people for mountaineering and eco-tourism who have played an incomparable role in enhancing national interest.
7. Made special contribution for the uplift of the national economy.
8. Excluded from the state apparatus for centuries and subjected to political, social and economic exclusion, marginalization and class-based oppression.
9. The Sherpa community is intensely inspired by the feeling of being included in the mainstream of the State by ensuring their rights and identity in the state apparatus jettisoning the old 'country is mine but not the state' mentality/thinking.

10. Availability of abundant quantity of bio-diversity in areas predominantly settled by the Sherpa people.
11. Immense possibility of water resources development as this region boasts of some of the longest glaciers in the world.
12. Eight of the 14 tallest mountains in the world are located in this region. The country collects more than Rs. 19 billion from mountaineering royalty.
13. Provides employment to people from other regions in tourism, hotel and carpet business sectors.
14. Although a remote district, it receives more foreign currency from remittances compared to other districts that have road connectivity and more developed.
15. Presence of historical monuments like stupas, monasteries, temples and shrines with the potentiality of being included in the list of UNESCO World Heritage Sites.
16. Administratively viable in terms of available facilities like electricity, communications, transportation, and development infrastructure.
17. Presence in the district of model hospitals throughout the country in the health sector.
18. Presence of several places mentioned in the Guinness Book of World Records and a majority of Nepali people setting world record residing here.
19. Presence of many wildlife reserves and wild animals on the verge of extinction.
20. Easy for international trade as the district borders with China.
21. Self-sufficient in dairy products including milk and the availability of market as the district is a model district in the country for animal husbandry.
22. Agricultural diversity and self-reliance in agriculture due to the presence of fertile land notwithstanding the world's tallest mountain.
23. Production of world-class carpet and rugs by means of sheep and yak rearing and wool spinning.
24. This community has the traditional knowledge and the intellectual property as per the international standards.
25. Feeling of gender equality, equal status of men and women in different sectors including in education and the feeling of tolerance towards other communities.
26. A majority of the mountain ranges that identify Nepal in the world are named in the Sherpa language.
27. Availability of transportation
 - a) Possibility of rope-way
 - b) Presence of the largest number of airfields in the country (Note: the airfields in the district make up for the losses incurred by all the other airports in the country.)

Apart from this, it is necessary to take the international experiences also as an example. Even Canada which is among the developed countries of the world has provinces such as Yukon and Nunavut with population of less than 35,000 each. It is seen that geography has been given priority in delineating the provinces in Canada. States like Wyoming in the United States of America have population of only around 500,000. Compared to this, the states of Quebec and Ontario in Canada have population in their millions while California and Texas in the USA have a population of 36 million and 25 million

respectively. The population of both these states is more than the total population of Nepal.

The above population statistics shows that federal states can be formed on the basis of geography notwithstanding the disparity in population. By the same token, why can not this same criterion be implemented in Nepal? In case of forming a Sherpa state, it has the basis of both identity and capability to become a state. In this connection, the question why can not multiple states be formed in the Tarai plains even if the population of a certain province is to be taken as the only basis for statehood has also figured prominently.

In this context, I would like to recall here that as a member of the Constituent Assembly's State Restructuring Committee, I have strongly raised voice in support of forming Sherpa Autonomous State based on identity and capacity, including other criteria like dense settlements in terms of population, covering large area in terms of geography and in terms of historical continuity having settled down in this part of Nepal since thousands of years.

Demarcation of Sherpa Autonomous State

The area between Taplejung in the east to Sindhupalchok in the west has been proposed as the Sherpa Autonomous State as the population of the Sherpas is more in this area. More than 26 districts in the country have considerable Sherpa population. The districts with sizeable population of Sherpas are Solukhumbu, Bhojpur, Ramechhap, Dolakha, Sindhupalchok, Taplejung, Okhaldhunga, Sankhuwasabha, Khotang, Terhathum, Sunsari, Dhankuta, Ilam and Kathmandu.

Here, I would like to inform you that the Committee on State Restructuring and Distribution of Power has proposed formation of altogether 13 federal states or provinces in its draft report. The proposed federal states are the Limbuwan State, the Kirat State, the Tamsaling State, the Kochila State, the Mithila State, the Newa State, the Sherpa State, the Buddha State, the Tamuwan State, the Magarat State, the Tharuhat State, the Karnali State and the Mahakali State.

On its part, the State Restructuring Sub-committee has proposed forming six or 14 federal states. A small number of CA members on the committee had argued against ethnicity as the basis for forming federal states. A majority of the CA members on the committee had supported through voice-vote formation of states based on ethnicity. Regarding the Sherpa Autonomous State, you are all aware that this topic has already been presented as a proposal due to strong lobbying and advocacy.

Conclusion

The indigenous Sherpa community has been kept away from the state apparatus, has been politically, socially and economically excluded and marginalized, has been subjected to class oppression due to the policy of discrimination adopted by the state for more than 240 years. Thus, Sherpas have been intentionally discriminated against by the state and their presence in every apparatus of the state is almost negligible.

The social structure of the Sherpas who have been geographically living in the mountainous region has been destroyed by dividing the Sherpa area into different districts in the name of state demarcation. In this manner, the Sherpas were politically weakened, denied political access and the empty nationalist policy of 'One Country, One Language, Uniform Dress' was adopted by the state in the past for erasing the language, religion and culture of the indigenous nationalities, including the Sherpa community.

It has become imperative to form an inclusive and autonomous state with the right to self-determination for the Sherpa people with a population of more than 500,000 who have been occupying a large area in the northern mountainous region of Nepal since centuries and who are a peace-loving people following Buddhism and having their own language, culture and unique lifestyle and who have carved a historical niche of their own worthy of the country to take pride in. Therefore, all Sherpas should be united and strive for achieving this historical goal.