

## **Language Preservation Practices in Nepal**

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### **Abstract**

*Preserving endangered language is one of the challenging tasks for the governments of the world. Day by day endangered languages are declining from the world due to various reasons. In the context of Nepal, some of the endangered languages are going to loss with changing socio economic and cultural situation. The study focused on language preservation practices of Nepal in term of legal and constitutional provisions and its implication. Policy formulation is not only sufficient for preserving endangered languages because implementation mechanisms cannot effectively function in developing and under developed nation like Nepal. The study followed qualitative research design and analyzed the issue related to language preservation policy and practices. By analyzing both primary and secondary data collected from different sources showed that language preservation practice cannot properly function in Nepal due to lack of resources, commitment of authority and influenced of global and national language.*

**Keywords:** *Endangered, language, policy, practice, Nepal*

### **Introduction**

Nepal is the homeland of various linguistic and cultural groups who has been living in Nepal since long ago. Mainly four major language families, namely, Indo-Aryan, Tibeto-Burman, Dravidian (Munda), and Austro-Asiatic, and one language isolate, Kusunda have found in Nepal (CBS Report, 2011. *The National Population and Household Census 2011* showed 123languages in Nepal. Except that around five million people did not mention their mother tongue in the census. It is showed that state policy could not play important role to preserve

and promote languages in Nepal. Population census and other government reports could not assure the exact numbers of languages and speakers in Nepal. In the context of Nepal, state's intervention played negative role to promote and preserve the multi-lingual ethos in past because the state focused on monolingual policy as guiding principal of nation. In 1990 new constitution had promulgated and Nepal constitutionally followed a multi-lingual nation system. But the provision could not implement in Nepal due to various reasons like, Civil war, order of Supreme Court, lack of resource mobilization etc.

Researchers and linguists like Silversteine (1979) focused on the language policy and its' role on language preservation. Only legal provision is not sufficient for endangered language preservation. In this regards, he further says:

Language politics is the way language is used in the political arena in which people can observe the treatment of language by various governmental and non-governmental agencies. Research related to language politics focuses on identifying and critiquing any sets of beliefs about language articulated by users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use. (Silverstein, 1979: 193)

Linguistic diversity should not only limit among certain majority languages and it should care minority languages that are fallen into crisis. Democratic government only limited their function in policy formation for certain language communities and give less priority to the minority languages. Economic forces divert the priority of state and state is now involving in global economy, foreign relation, and globalization, access of internet and poverty reduction. Issue of language and culture are fallen into the less priority sector of government. Few resources are investing in preserving endangered language and culture existing in Nepal. Public investment is high in expanding English language. Government policy clearly mentioned the provision of providing mother tongue education in basic level; however, except few schools English or Nepali language is highly used as medium of instruction in basic level. Mother tongue education only practices among certain majority languages like The Newar, the Tamang, and the Magar other minorities' languages like the Raji, the Kusunda, and the Bankaria is going to decline.

### **Language Practices in Nepal**

Before unification, Kathmandu valley and its surrounded area was known as Nepal. Newari language was used in Kathmandu valley and Khash *bhasa*(Nepali language) was used in surrounding areas. For business purpose both Nepali and Newari languages were used equally to interact with people. After unification, Nepali language was introduced as national language and also was used as medium of instruction in government office. During Rana period Nepali language further became stronger than the previous and strictly implemented in all parts of the states. Formal education also began in Nepali language "Jaya Prithivi Bahadur Sing, the first educationists of Nepal prepared text book language and distributed to all the schools"

(Adhikari, 2070). The Rana rulers had suppressed various language movements (Newar, Hindi, Maithili, etc.). In this regard Gautam (2021) notes:

Which serves as evidence of their deliberate plan to eliminate all but one language, viz. Nepali? In this sense, we can understand that Nepal's diversity and multilingual identity were suppressed historically in the name of nation-building and promoting national integration among people with diverse ethnic and cultural orientations.(p.4)

In 1950, Rana regime had abolished and democracy was introduced. With the establishment of democracy, some changes were noticed in languages issue; however, democratic government could not function for long period. In 1956, six years later of introducing democracy, education planning commission was formed. The commission focused on Nepali language as medium of instruction for basic level. The first national report on education basically reflected the ideology of mono-lingualism with the influence of Hugh. B. Wood (Sardar et al.1956). It stated, "If the younger generation is taught to use Nepali as the basic language then other languages will gradually disappear" (Sardar at. 1956:1972). The report is the first report related to education prioritized to Nepali language as medium of instruction. In 1962 democratic system dissolved and single party Panchayati system was introduced. Panchayati government also promoted the Nepali language by using the slogan of "one language, one dress, one country" (*eutaa bhasha, eutaa bhash, eutaa desh*). Panchayati rulers adopted the assimilation policy and created hegemony among indigenous people.

Since 1948 Nepali Language put in the centre of other languages and directly or indirectly focused on the implementation of Nepal language as national language. Government Act of Nepal 1948 notes, "All proceedings of the Legislative Assembly shall be in Nepali national language"(Article, 44). The first constitution mentioned Nepali language as national and other constitutions also followed the same tradition. The constitutions lunched before 1990 only focused on the Nepali language and created biasness to other languages. The Interim Government of Nepal Act, 1951 is silence on language issue, however, The Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal 1959 mentioned about language issue as, "National Language: The National Language of Nepal shall be the Nepali language in Devanagri script" (Article, 70). The Constitution did not talk about other languages spoken in Nepal although the constitution is known as democratic constitution of Nepal. In 1962 democratic system and democratic government replaced by the tyrannical panchayat system and new constitution promulgated in Nepal with strict provision of monolingual policy. The constitution of Nepal, 1962 notes about language system as, "National Language the national language of Nepal is the Nepali language in the Devanagari script" (Article, 4). In the same way, article (8) "Acquisition and termination of citizenship to be regulated by law" sub article 2 (a) mentioned the qualification to get citizenship as; "He can read and write the national language of Nepal". The provision further tight the provision of Nepali language and made as the qualification to get citizenship. The constitution neglects the existence of other languages. In 1990 Panchayati system abolished and new constitution was promulgated in the same year. The constitution also emphasized on

Nepali language and its official used. Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal -1990 notes, Language of the Nation: (Article -6):(1) The Nepali language in the Devanagari script is the language of the nation of Nepal the Nepali language shall be the official language. (2) All the languages spoken as the mother tongue in the various pans of Nepal are the national languages of Nepal". Like that in (Article 9)4.a mentions "Acquisition and Termination of Citizenship after the Commencement of the Constitution, "that he can speak and write the language of the nation of Nepal". In the same way, Article 18 Culture and education Right mentions "Each community residing within the Kingdom of Nepal shall have the right to preserve and promote its language script and culture" (a). In directive principal article 25 and article 26 also mentioned to preserve language and script of each cultural community, "Promotion of their languages, literature, scripts, arts and cultures"(Article, 26).The provision of the constitution could not implement in Nepal and new revolution began in 1995 in the leadership of CPN Maoist. Language and culture are the main issue Maoist civil war. They demand federalism on the basis of linguistic and cultural identities. In this context, new constitution has promulgated in Nepal in the name of Interim Constitution of Nepal 2007. The constitution is the most liberal constitution for language promotion and preservation. The constitution made the following provision to safe the indigenous language in Nepal:

Article (6) Language of the Nation: (1) all the languages spoken as mother tongues in Nepal are the languages of nation.(2) The Nepali Language in Devanagari script shall be the official language. (3) Notwithstanding anything contained in Clause (2), nothing shall be deemed to prevent the using of any language spoken as the mother tongue in a local body and office. The State shall maintain records by translating the languages so used in the official language. Article 17 (3),every community residing in Nepal shall have the right to preserve and promote its language, script, culture, cultural civilization and heritage. Articles 138 notes the issue of state restructure as "(1). There shall be made progressive restructuring of the State with inclusive, democratic federal system of governance state restructure on the basis of language and culture"

The constitution gives equal value to all languages but in practice Nepali language only used as official language in Nepal . Constitution of Nepal 2015has promulgated with same provision of language including independent language commission. The constitution made the following in different articles and sub articles that are as follows:

Article(6) Languages of the nation: All languages spoken as the mother tongues in Nepal are the languages of the nation. Article (7) Official language: (1) The Nepali language in the Devnagari script shall be the official language of Nepal. (2) A State may, by a State law, determine one or more than one languages of the nation spoken by a majority of people within the State as its official language(s), in addition to the Nepali language. (3) Other matters relating to language shall be as decided by the Government of Nepal, on recommendation of the Language Commission. Article (32) Right to language and culture: (1) every person and community shall have the right to use their languages (3) Every Nepalese community residing in Nepal shall have the right to preserve and promote its

language, script, culture, cultural civilization and heritage. Article (287). Language Commission: (1) The Government of Nepal shall, no later than one year of the commencement of this Constitution, constitute a Language Commission comprising representation of States.(Constitution of Nepal, 2015)

The constitution brings various positive provision to preserve and promote endangered languages, however, the practice of people and government agency are unable to preserve the minority language.

### **Research Method**

The study followed the qualitative research design and included the short openings of activists involving in language preservation movement. Primary data were obtained from semi-structured interviews with two selected individuals who have been working in language preserving movement. Short views of the participants about language preservation practices also included in the paper. Data were collected through in formal interview that has conducted in May, 2022. The interviews (altogether 1 h each) were recorded, transcribed, and translated into English, and were checked for accuracy and reliability. To maintain secrecy of the participants, I have given Sheaudo-name of the participants (P1) and (P2).

P1 have been working in political party and struggled for language preservation who has been working as a freelance language activist for more than 20 years, involving himself in many governmental and non-governmental policies and programs related to language issues. P2 worked as a researcher and produced many books about language policy and practice. Both participants have been actively engaging in language politics and planning. It is assumed that their ideas would make the understanding of language preservation practice in Nepal. Secondary data were obtained from available literature about language policies and practice. Various documents, and other published research papers have been carefully utilized as source of secondary data. Library research method used to collect the data from library.

### **Practices of Endangered Language Preservation in Nepal.**

Language preservation is being political issue in Nepal rather than safeguarding the endangered languages. Moist civil war, democratic movement and other indigenous movements politically set the foundation of language policy in Nepal however, the policies have not implemented till date. Without implementing the policy we cannot save the endangered language from loss. In Nepal some of the languages are being out of use and some are in the way of loss. UNESCO categorizes four levels of endangered languages. The following table shows the detail of endangered languages that need to preserve.

The languages listed below are endangered in Nepal, although they may be vibrant in other countries.

**Table 1: Endangered Languages of Nepal**

S.N.	Language	Situation
1.	Athpare	Definitely endangered
2.	Bahing	Definitely endangered
3.	Bantawa	Vulnerable
4.	Baram	Critically endangered
5.	Bote-Darai	Severely endangered
6.	Chamling	Definitely endangered
7.	Chantyal	Definitely endangered
8.	Chepang	Vulnerable
9.	Chintang	Severely endangered
10.	Chulung	Definitely endangered
11.	Danuwar	Severely endangered
12.	Dhimal	Severely endangered
13.	Dol-po	Definitely endangered
14.	Dumi	Critically endangered
15.	Dungmali	Definitely endangered
16.	Ghale	Vulnerable
17.	Gurung	Definitely endangered
18.	Gyasumdo	
19.	Ha-lung Tibetan	
20.	Vayu	Definitely endangered
21.	Jerung	Definitely endangered
22.	Jirel	Critically endangered
23.	Kagate	Vulnerable
24.	Kaike	Definitely endangered
25.	Khaccaḍ Bhoṭe	Definitely endangered
26.	Khaling	Definitely endangered
27.	Kham	Definitely endangered
28.	Kohi	Definitely endangered
29.	Kulung	Definitely endangered
30.	Kumhali	Vulnerable
31.	Kurux	Vulnerable
32.	Kusunda	Severely endangered
33.	Langthang Tibetan	Vulnerable
34.	Limirong Tibetan	Critically endangered
35.	Lohorung	Definitely endangered
36.	Loke Tibetan	Definitely endangered
37.	Magar	Severely endangered

38.	Majhi	Definitely endangered
39.	Mewahang	Definitely endangered
40.	Nachhiring	Severely endangered
41.	Nar Phu	Severely endangered
42.	Newar	Severely endangered
43.	Nubri	Definitely endangered
44.	Nyishangba	Definitely endangered
45.	Puma	Definitely endangered
46.	Raji	Definitely endangered
47.	Raute	Severely endangered
48.	Sām	Severely endangered
49.	Sampang	Severely endangered
50.	Santali	Severely endangered
51.	Seke	Vulnerable
52.	Sunwar	Vulnerable
53.	Surel	Vulnerable
54.	Thakali	Vulnerable
55.	Thangmi	Critically endangered
56.	Thulung	Vulnerable
57.	Tilung	Definitely endangered
58.	Tsum	Definitely endangered
59.	Wambule	Definitely endangered
60.	Yakkha	Definitely endangered
61.	Yamphu	Vulnerable

Source: Sueyoshi and Ingrid Toba Novel Kishor Rai (2010)

Above table highlights the situation of languages in Nepal. Data shows that state policy only cannot sufficient for preserving endangered languages. As multilingual nation people have option to speak different languages, however, social, historical, political, and economic power relations force people either speak Nepali or English. In recent time linguistic discourse of the society is moving slowly towards code-mixing, switching, translanguaging, and the shifting from the heritage languages to the dominant and global languages. Various factors play role in language languages preservation in Nepal. Some are as follow:

### **Influenced of Majority Language and global language**

Nepali language occupies the space of majority language in Nepal. However, Language like Tamang, Newari, Maithali, Tharu, Magar and Bhojpuri are also occupying the position of majority language in certain area. Forceful influenced of Nepali language these languages are fall into the corner and only used in informal causal communication in family. Banks, government offices, schools and colleges, market place, on government organizations only use

Nepali language to communicate with people. Most of the time people from majority language speakers' group forcefully talk his/her own language and compelled people of minority language speakers to use majority language. People from minority language community also love to follow global language. In this context p1 noted that "people from minority language community love to learn English rather than the majority language of Nepal. In schools and market place they try to speak English. English is more popular among minority language community people than the Nepali speakers. Influenced of global language is very high in Nepal to minority languages. Slowly and gradually they either shift majority or global language rather continue their own language".

### **Globalization, Migration and Influences of Science and Technology**

Language preservation is being challenges in Nepal due to globalization, migration and influences of science and technology. People are migrated from traditional homeland to new places where their mother tongue does not use in communication. The context forced them to speak national and global language. Technology like mobile phone, computer and other modern equipments use English language as instruction. To use these modern technology or tools one most uses global language. The fast pace of globalization, migration and technology create multiple problems in practice of language preservation in Nepal.

### **Policy Implementation**

Government policy provides equal rights to all languages but positive discrimination and large amount of resources is necessary to preserve minority languages. Since 1990 provision of mother tongue education in basic level has been constitutional approved, however, till date none of the minority languages can use in schools as medium of instruction in basic level. Lack of resources, complexity in policy and constitutional provision, negligence of respected community leaders play role in loss of engendered language. Both federal, province and local governments are responsible to implement constitutional and legal provisions but the units of government have not allocate sufficient resources to implement the provision. So language preservation practice is challenging in Nepal.

### **Education System**

Education policy discourages minority language to use in school or college education. Nepali or English is used only instruction medium of education so that minority language only limited in home as informal communication. Text books are produced only in Nepali or English language so that schools are compelled to use these text books. If local government wants to implement mother tongue education in basic level text books will produce in local level. The book production is difficult and costly for the local government. In this regards, P2 notes that "Local government has limited resources which are insufficient to prepare textbooks. Textbooks management is difficult task which is almost impossible in local level. Education system creates huddles in language preservation practice in Nepal by limiting in resources and forcing to use national language".



### **Other Issue Related to Practice of Language Preservation**

Language preservation policy is always being complex in Nepal because all the constitutions mentioned Devanagari script and Nepali language as top priority along with other languages. Such types of provision create confusion to use other languages as official languages. Except Nepali, none of the other languages use official language in Nepal. In this regard p1 notes, "In Nepal since hundred years Nepali language and English language have enhanced linguistic power in Nepal and other languages reached into the situation of endangered".

Practice of language preserving is now leading in confusing course because language preservation policy cannot run properly in Nepal. Some of the languages are going to limit in history, however, government does not allocate sufficient budget for language preservation. Language commission also does not properly function due to lack of sufficient budget.

### **Conclusion**

Since 1950, issue of language has been raised in Nepal, however, followed multilingual identities in 1990 after promulgation of the constitution of 1990. The constitution firstly accepted the multilingual national identities of Nepal. Constitutional provision brought positive effect on people and two languages were in the process of being official languages but that could not due to order of the Supreme Court. Constitution of Nepal 2015 establish the provision to make separate language commission. b Language commission has certain constitutional rights but the commission still has not recommended other languages as official language. Language commission and some local bodies have documented some endangered languages. Except that language commission also does not work top reserve endangered language. Complexity in legal provision, lack of resources and influenced of English and Nepali languages created problems in the practice of language preservation in Nepal.

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