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A Historical Study of the Nepal Baptist Church Council (NBCC)

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Abstract

A Historical Study of the Nepal Baptist Church Council (NBCC) is a research project about the historical development and emergence of the Baptist Church in Nepal. This Christian denomination was brought to Nepal by a group of indigenous young people who returned to their home country Nepal from Northeast India during the 1980s. Without any involvement of foreign missionaries and evangelists, they started what would later become the NBCC. Therefore, NBCC considered an “indigenous Baptist organization” founded by native pioneers, and that has been part of the World Baptist Alliance (BWA) partnership over 25 years.

Among the many other church denominations that exist in Nepal, this research project is focused on the Nepal Baptist Churches and leaders. Nepal is a multicultural, multi-religious, and multi-linguistic, society with people of many races, colors, casts, and ethnicities. Since ancient times, Nepal had been ruled by Hindu kings who shaped Nepal into Hindu society. The Buddhists, Muslims, and Christians, who have always been religious minorities in the country, were often vulnerable to discrimination and persecution.

The thesis briefly explores the arrival of the Baptist faith in Nepal, chronicles church planting, the formation of NBCC. The conversion of pioneers and their return home, international partnership, and NBCC’s growth as an organization and its struggles to success. The study concludes with a (presentation of the) analysis of NBCC’s effective church planting models and administration and improvement areas based on Baptist church leader’s interviews and opinions. These findings are gathered in adherence to empirical and qualitative methods and rely heavily on oral history, using oral theory as a method to write a history of the NBCC.

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Abbreviations

AD	(Anno Domini) in the year of the Lord
APBF	Asia Pacific Baptist Federation
B.C.	Before Christ
BCAP-1	Baptist Church Association Province – 1
BCAP-2, 3	Baptist Church Association Province – 1, 2
B.C.A.P.- 4, 5	Baptist Church Association Province – 4, 5
B.C.A.P.- 6, 7	Baptist Church Association Province – 6, 7
B.Th.	Bachelor of Theology
BMS	Baptist Missionary Society
B.W.A.	Baptist World Alliance
CBO.	Local Community Based Organization
CBS	Central Bureau of Statistics
CBDRRP	Community Based Disaster Relief and Recovery Project
CE	Common Era
CHEP	Community Health and Education Project
CHEST	Community Health and Engineering for sustainable
CPN	Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist)
CSLD	Community Support and Livelihood Development
C. TH	Certificate of Theology

ed., eds.	Editor or Editors
e.g.	For example
esp.	Especially
etc.	and others of the same class, and so forth
f., ff.	and the following page(s)
FNCN	Federation of National Christian Nepal
GDP	Gross Domestic Products
HELP	Health Education for Lay People
HIV	Human Immune Deficiency Virus
INF	International Nepali Fellowship
INGO(s)	International Non-Governmental Organization(s)
Kms	Kilo Meters Square
M& E	Mission and Evangelism
Mt.	Matthew
MCDS	Multiple Community Development
NBBC	Nepal Baptist Bible College
NBCC	Nepal Baptist Church Council
NCF	National Churches Fellowship
NCFN.	National Churches Fellowship of Nepal
NBJAC.	Nepal Baptist Joint Action Committee
NBCY.	Nepal Baptist Children Fellowship

NBYF	Nepal Baptist Youth Fellowship
NBWF	Nepal Baptist Women Fellowship
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organization(s)
N.M.M.	Nagaland Missionary Movement
p., pp.	Page, Pages
SEDEP	Socio-Economic Development and Empowerment Project
SWC.	Social Welfare Council
UMN	United Mission to Nepal
Vol.	Volume
www.	World Wide Web

1 Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The title of the research is “*A Historical Study of Nepal Baptist Church Council (NBCC).*” The church in Nepal is very young. It officially began after the arrival of democracy in 1950. The Gospel was carried back to Nepal by diaspora Nepali who had spent time in North East India, Bhutan, Assam, Darjeeling, and Sikkim and who migrated during the Anglo-Nepal war (1814-1816) for work opportunities. During that time, the presence of the British in India created new jobs in tea plantations, construction of railway tracks, and various kinds of factories. All these attracted young Nepalese people who migrated there for jobs. Among the external diaspora population were those who carried the Gospel back into their homeland when Nepal was ‘closed’ to outside religions. After 1950, numerous diverse initiatives like education, social service, medical care, hydropower, bird expeditions, tourism, and foreign expats brought the Gospel and helped to build churches in Nepal. In the process of entering different missions and denominations, Baptist church was introduced by migrated young people to North-East India in the mid 90ies from Eastern Nepal. Eventually, this group of people was able to start Nepal Baptist Church Council (NBCC) over thirty years of tireless efforts and significant contributions with the partnership with local churches, Baptist World Alliance, and many other international partners.

The main aim of this research is to find out the historical development and establishment of NBCC, the contribution of pioneers, initial partnership with international partners, the current administrative structure of NBCC and its impact and influences in the Nepalese communities.

This chapter will present the short background of the historical past of how the NBCC and Gospel came to Nepali territory. The chapter mainly focuses on the background of research, research questions, research overview, thesis structure, and research motivation.

1.2 Background

“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witness in Jerusalem, and all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the Earth” (Acts 1:8, NIV). These were the prophetic words of Jesus before His Ascension from His disciples, who were under pressure and confusion to accomplish the Great Commission of their master Jesus Christ. “Go

and make disciples to all nations,” he said (Mt. 28:19, NIV). It was a responsibility entrusted by Jesus to His disciples.

The New Testament Church established on the day of Pentecost became a visual experience in the upper room for the first time in human history under the leadership of Apostle Peter. It was just as Jesus promised when he said, “And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it” (Mt. 16:18, NIV). When the church began to grow continuously by crossing one after another – terrifying situation, the prophetic words of Jesus began to fulfill Churches that were established all over Europe and Asia minor within a century. However, it was not until the 1700 century that people brought the Gospel to the Himalaya kingdom (Nepal), which had generally remained a closed land for the Gospel of Jesus Christ for several centuries.

After the 1951 Revolution, which established the Democratic Government in Nepal under King Birendra, the growth of Christianity increased dramatically. In the beginning, Nepali people considered Christianity to be a foreign religion (religion of white people). It became a religion for the poor, Dalit (outcast people), and marginalized people because of social aid work. For Nepali people, to be Christian meant rejecting their family and friends’ culture, society, and personal identity. The conversion into Christianity considered a betrayal of their religion, caste and creed, tradition, and culture. In many obstacles and much suffering, many denominational churches developed throughout the country. One of them was the Nepal Baptist Church.

The Nepal Baptist Church Council (NBCC) is one of the largest church organizations in Nepal. It was formed on 11 April 1993 by the first generation of Christians in the eastern part of Nepal. Now NBCC runs more than 236 churches, 239 cell churches with 20,000 Baptized believers, Bible schools, and non-profit organizations in different parts of Nepal, all of which they established in the last two decades. There are a lot of various denominations and mission organizations in Nepal, but NBCC’s work and growth are recognized as the largest Baptist mission in Nepal.

The main objective of this study is to find out an account of historical facts and statistics of the Nepal Baptist Church Council, especially those related to its existence and church planting strategies and growth of the first Baptist missionaries’ work in Nepal. Also, a researcher goes

to observe its origins, growth, formation, and current impact on the Nepalese society and local churches.

1.3 Research Overview

There are no books or written documents of NBCC's development and growth in Nepali society. As someone who has converted from Hinduism to the Baptist faith, I felt drawn to using researching and recording this historical account to preserve the first-hand experiences and story of NBCC pioneers. In December 2019, I spent three weeks in Nepal conducting interviews with NBCC pioneers and local church pastors. In total, ten interviews were conducted in person, and the remaining six were conducted by email and Skype. During the meetings, I tried to look for in-depth answers to each research question. While this research may not present every single detail and timeframe of NBCC's development, I have tried my best to bring all the facts and significant events within one available resource. Analyzing the interviews was a challenging process, especially deciphering testimonials from facts and truth about the past. In a few cases, leaders were not interested in opening up and speaking from their perspective. An example of this was the conflict between women's leadership (ordaining female pastors and deacons) and church leadership, which occurred right after NBCC's establishment. Due to these circumstances and ethical confidentiality, some chapters of this thesis sound more like testimonial than historical accounts.

As for the methodological framework, I applied oral history theory to understand the narratives and memories of NBCC pioneers and local church leaders in a way that helps them to remember the past and tell memories of their involvement before and after the existence of the NBCC. As a researcher, I found oral sources to be the only source of the historical development of NBCC, which required documenting them in an orderly manner depending on their narrations and uncovering of their memories. Therefore, this research project is entirely based on narratives and memories of founding members, pastors, lay members, and administrative staff of NBCC, with a few secondary resources available from the library.

1.4 Research Questions

I have formulated the following research questions to investigate the historical facts and data related to the Nepal Baptist Church Council. Since the formation of NBCC, many progressive activities and associations have formed. Since its establishment two decades ago, the NBCC has come to be the most significant and recognizable church association in Nepal. Despite their prominence, no history has been written about NBCC, and no literal accounts have been recorded in the form of written documents. Therefore, my research questions have a focus on the origins and formation of NBCC, the accounts of pioneers, the denomination's growth, and its contributions to the Nepalese society as a faith-based organization. To explore these topics, I have formulated the following questions:

- i) How did the Baptist Mission enter into the land of Nepal?**
- ii) Who were the pioneers and their contributions to the Baptist churches in Nepal?**
- iii) What was the historical development of NBCC and its relation to local churches?**

Since there are so many Christian denominations within Nepal, this research will be limited only to the Baptist denominations and their activities. This research provides NBCC with documentation of its history, and other organizations learn from NBCC to find the best way to evangelize more than 97% of the non-Christian community who considers being an ancient religious person in the world (Hinduism), Buddhism, Islam, and animist.

1.5 Thesis Structure

The thesis divided into six chapters. The first chapter introduces the theme, research areas, overview, research questions, and research motivation. Chapter Two presents a brief history of Nepal, including the historical background of Christianity in Nepal. This chapter also presents brief religious, cultural, and political trends in Nepali society. The later second part covers the history of how the Gospel arrive in Nepal, the rise of democracy and its influences on the establishment of churches, persecution from the Nepal Government, and Baptist missions entering Nepal as well as different other church denominations. Chapter Three presents a complete research methodology and data collection, transcription, and interview procedures. Chapter Four presents the theoretical approaches to historical research and writings based on oral theory. The Five chapters deal with the historical background of

NBCC, including its origins, contributions and dedication of pioneers, the establishment of first Baptist churches, the formation of the NBCC as an organization, its growth in different parts of the country, and last but not least, the involvement of women with the NBCC. Finally, the Sixth chapter presents critical research findings, impacts, recommendations, and conclusions.

1.6 Literature Review

Because of unavailable written documents regarding NBCC, a significant portion of writings depends on the in-depth interviews and observations of the informants. Even though NBCC has celebrated its 25th year of service and existence in Nepal, there are few primary or secondary sources available to the public. That is why in-depth interviews with NBCC personnel, pastors, leaders, lay members, women leaders, and pioneers are the primary source of data about Nepali Baptist church communities. Apart from the collected interview data, there are some secondary sources about the history of Christianity in Nepal. Following listed books, journal, letters, and souvenirs are so far collected archives for this research projects; A Biographical history of the churches in Nepal by Cindy Perry), Nepal around the World (by Cindy Perry), Christianity in Nepal (by Simon Pandey), Early churches in Nepal (by Rajendra Rongong), Baptist Church History and Distinctive (by Prem Narayan Bhattarai), and Nepal and the Gospel of God (by Jonathan Lindell), The essential background of Nepal Baptist Church by Prem Narayan Bhattarai (Articles), Border Effects to Evangelize Nepal Prior 1951 by Udi Jung Gurung (Article), 50Years in God's hands 1954-2004 by Kehrberg Norman (Souvenir articles), Nepal Christian Church Golden Jubilee Souvenir, and Memories of Past by Adon Rongong (Annual Report Articles).

1.7 Research Motivation

My own experience of being converted and brought into the Baptist church community in 1999 and my interest in the history of NBCC's 25 years in Nepal has motivated this research project. Since Nepali Church history is very young in the world's church history, there is not much contemporary documented literature except for *The History of the Expansion of Protestant Christianity among the Nepali Diaspora* by Dr. Cindy Perry. It records the short history of Protestant Christians entering the closed land of Nepal during the time of Monarchy by the Nepali Diaspora community from the East side of Nepal. The government of Nepal has

never recognized churches in Nepal since the time Portuguese Missionaries brought the Gospel to Nepal around 1628. Then in 1703, Capuchin Fathers came into the Kathmandu Valley. Even after the four-century passed by, the government still did not recognize churches and considered them as foreign religious institutions. Within these many decades, churches, Bible schools, training centers, mission organizations, and Christian non-profits experienced tremendous discrimination, persecution, and suffering. They were treated as second class citizens in the same country. Among the few church denominations in the small Christian community, Nepal Baptist Churches were considered to be the fastest growing and most efficiently run churches.

This inspiring history of the NBCC is essential to record, so that younger generations like me can remember how Nepali Christian pioneers sacrificed their lives for the sake of Christ. This research developed into a book that would make available for biblical scholars and others for academic purposes and all.

1.8 Chapter Summary

The first chapter summarizes the research topic, purpose, research problems and questions, and methodological framework of the study. The main intention is to record the remarkable history of Nepal Baptist Church Council (NBCC) and its mission for church planting and social work in Nepal as a Christian organization. During the 25 years of its existence, NBCC has contributed a tremendous positive atmosphere despite such multiple persecutions and difficulties from the government, Hindu based institutions, neighbors, and even from other denominations. Despite all the challenges, NBCC continued to reach people. It retained its firm organization administration and mission, which has been an example of similar organizations.

2 Chapter Two: Origin and Background of Nepalese Churches

2.1 Introduction

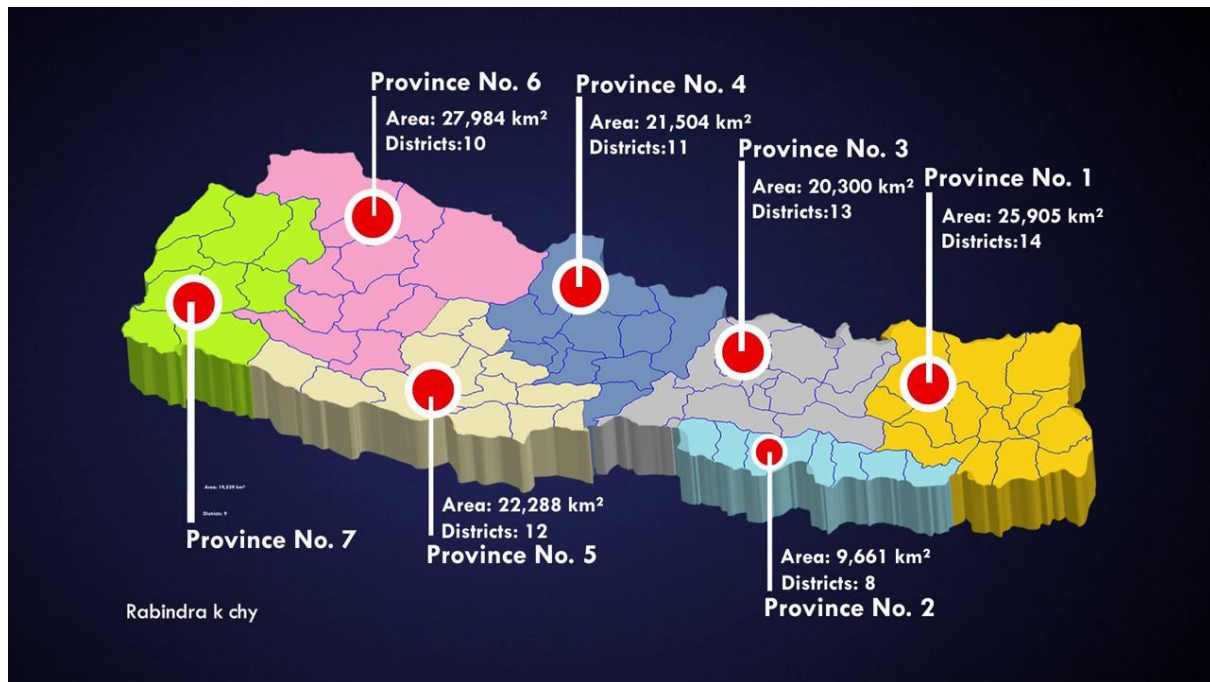
This chapter gives a brief history of Nepal. It provides the cultural, socio-political, and religious background of the Nepalese people and country into which Christian missionaries came and touched the hearts of the people. Diverse groups of people with different ethnicities, religions, cultures, and languages have lived in Nepal's high Himalaya region, Middle Mountain (Pahar) region, and flat green and fertile Tarai region for many centuries. This chapter will explain how the churches grew in Nepal despite geographical difficulties and cultural barriers. In the context of Nepal, many people considered Christianity to be a foreign religion (religion of white people); however, that was not true at all. Many Nepalese people adopted the new religion and became faithful practitioners.

2.2 A Brief Background History of Nepal

Dor Bahadur Bista, a Nepali anthropologist, states that “Nepali society today is a unique combination of peoples of different origins, coming from different directions, in different periods of history and blended into one national identity (“Dor Bdr. Bista, as quoted in Perry”, 1997, p. 1). That one national identity developed as an incredibly complex mix of ethnoreligious communities from east to west. Waves of migration from two great neighbors to the north and south, Tibet and India, respectively, made Nepal a place where over centuries, ethnicity, culture, and religion blended and evolved uniquely.

Nepal's recorded history begins in 7th BCE when the *Kirats*, Mongolian people, came to Nepal from the east. They are said to have been Nepal's first inhabitants. Very little known of the *Kirati* Era, but early Sanskrit literature describes *Kiratas* as early rulers and hunter tribes from the mountains. About 300CE, the s, known as Hindu people, migrated from North India and overthrew the *Kiratis* kingdom in the Kathmandu Valley. Later, Hinduism became the main religion and the caste system imposed in society.

Fig No: 1 States Map of Nepal, 2018



The *Licchavis* were in power until 602 CE when the *Mallas* took over political power. Most historians claim that under the *Licchavis*, Nepal was a prosperous state. Land and agriculture were the main pillars of the economy. The country became a hub for trade between India and Tibet. During the *Licchavi* era, the rulers started the taxation system, commonly known as ‘*trikara*’ (Dhungle & Dahal, 2018, p. 4). The rulers effectively governed the country up to the eighth century, after which they gradually lost their power and position to *Mallas*, who finally gained control of the state and government by the end of the fourteenth century. During the mid1300s, the royal families (*Mallas* regimes) began quarreling and dividing into many small city-states. On the other side of the country, a Muslim invasion of the area left Nepal relatively unharmed, though several Hindus and Buddhist shrines were damaged. It was India that faced significant destruction, which caused many Hindus to seek refuge in Nepal. The new population surge created even more city-states within Nepal; each city-state had its own coined currencies and armies.

In 1372, Kathmandu’s King Jayasthiti *Malla* took over the neighboring city-state of Patan, and a decade later, the city-state Bhaktapur. This unified Kathmandu Valley into one vast kingdom called Nepal Mandala. The King divided the entire population into Shaiva and Buddhist sects, clearly defining their status, duties, and responsibilities (Dhungle & Dahal,

2018, p. 3). The reign of King Yaksha *Malla* in the mid-1400s saw Nepal's borders extended south to the Ganges River, and north through Tibet. However, after he died in 1482, Nepal split up into many small states called Baisi (divided into twenty-two kingdoms) and Chaubisi (divided into twenty-four kingdoms). These small states would continue to battle with each other for 200 years. As the fighting continued, a new dynasty came into power led by the Shah Kings. The Shah Kings of Gorkha, a small kingdom located halfway in between Kathmandu and Pokhara, gradually extended their power. In 1768, Prithvi Narayan Shah, King of Gorkha, steadily conquered all the small states and unified a nation (Magar, 2005, pp. 5-6). On 21 March 1770, he made Kathmandu his capital, realizing its overall geographic and strategic importance for exchanging business, trade, and power. It was Prithvi Narayan Shah and his successors who founded and led what became known as Nepal in the present day (Sharma, 1991, p. 64). This dynasty ruled over Nepal for many years until the *Ranas* Dynasty took power for 104 years (1846-1951). The founder of the Ranas autocracy was Jung Bahadur Kunwar. He seized power by killing 30-40 civilians on the day that became known as the *Kot* Massacre. He took the state power from the King Rajendra Bikram Shah. Ranas limited the ability of the King and Queen by making them nominal heads of the state and centralized doctoral control to the Prime Minister.

The century-long *Ranas* regime introduced several reforms in socio-economic and administrative fields. The *Ranas* most likely wanted to show the world they were the greatest reformers in the history of Nepal. Civilians, however, could hardly enjoy the benefits of the *Ranas* regime. That is why, in 1951, when the autocratic regime collapsed, people found that the country had been left far behind in the race of progress (Dhungle & Dahal, 2018, p. 10). The collapse of the *Ranas* regime corresponded with the British withdrawal from India and family clashes among the Ranas families. King Tribhuvana's revolutionary movement led by the Nepal Congress party and its leader, B.P. Koirala, also played a tremendous role in overthrowing the *Rana* regime with the help of the Indian government.

After the fall of the *Rana* regime, King Tribhuvan became the head of the state and shared power with the NC (Nepal Congress party) and *Rana's* family. This democratic experiment lasted until 1960 and oversaw the writing of a democratic constitution. It ended when King Mahendra staged a coup against the elected parliament and dismissed the parliamentary democracy by taking all the state power with him. From 1961 to 1990 (Panchayat Rule), King

Mahendra was the head of the state and banned all political parties and activities in the country. In order to provide the legal basis to his direct rule, King Mahendra promulgated the Nepal Special Arrangement Act 1961, which gave supreme executive and legislative powers to the King. The council of the ministers existed only to carry out the directives of the King (Dhungle & Dahal, 2018, p. 15).

In 1972, after the death of King Mahendra, his son, Birendra, succeeded his throne and continued the same administrative policies until 1990 when the Panchayat systems finally ended by lifting the ban on political parties. Since then, multiparty democracy was restored under the leadership of significant party Nepali Congress (NC). Unfortunately, the government was not stable due to internal clashes within the administration and massive corruption at the political level, which led to the Maoist revolution (Maoist was a faction from the CPN) and civil war. The country was consumed by violence for nearly ten years (1996-2006), killing approximately seventeen thousand civilians and government personnel (armies and police). Thousands of people displaced from rural Nepal and the war destroyed infrastructures like schools, hospitals, and roads. The Maoist agenda included overthrowing the Monarchy and establishing republic states. Other political parties supported these goals, thus the Monarchy government was abolished and a new republican state founded in Nepal.

Currently, Nepal holds elections at the local level, state legislatures, and federal parliament, with the most recent election completed in January 2018. The new government assured political stability, at least for the next five years (Dhungle & Dahal, 2018, p. 26).

Nepal had been ruled by different family dynasties (Shahs & Ranas) for centuries without invasion from outsiders. Nepal is one of the countries that were never colonized by a European nation. Throughout its history, religious harmony was a unique feature of Nepal, with Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam coexisting since the medieval period. Society and government, however, rejected Christianity. The issue of religion will be discussed in detail later, but first, here is a look at various aspects of Nepal and Nepalese society.

2.2.1 Land and People

Nepal is an underdeveloped land-locked nation of enormous cultural and ethnic diversity. It has a population of 26,494,504, according to the 22 June 2011 census (National Report, National Population and Housing Census, 2011, p. 3). Nepal has 6,000 rivers and rivulets,

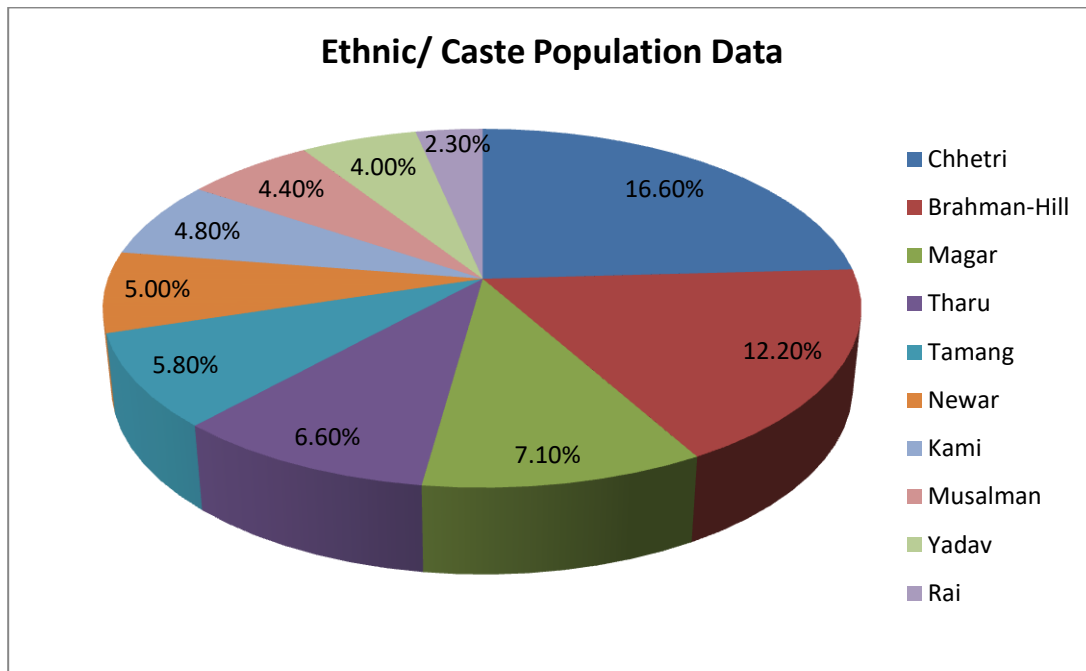
5,00 species of vascular plants, 175 species of mammals, and 850 species of birds within its 147,181 km² territories (Regmi, 1999, p. 8). The shape of Nepal is a long narrow country, lying east to west. As one proceeds to the west, the country inclines northward. The average length is about 840 km, and the breadth, 160 km (Sanwal, 1993, p. 2). Administratively, Nepal divided into seven states after the establishment of the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal. These states are divided into six metropolitan cities, eleven sub-metropolitan, 276 municipalities, and 460 ruler development houses. Nepal is characterized by three distinct geographical regions: the mountains and Himalayas, the hills, and plains (Terai). There are about 250 peaks in Nepal, including Mount Everest (called Sagarmatha in the Nepali language), which stands at 8,948 meters (Regmi, 1999, p. 9).

The population of Nepal divided into three racial groups based on language and physical features:

- i) Tibeto-Burman language speaking groups inhabiting the northern parts and mid-mountain regions.
- ii) The Indo-Aryan language-speaking groups were occupying the middle hills and Terai areas.
- iii) A small group of Terai people who speak a Dravidian-related language.

Though these three languages and groups have their differences, most cultural groups in Nepal are the product of hundreds and thousands of years of mixing language, culture, and religion within the different geographical areas – the Himalayas, mountains, and Terai. People from Tibet came to dominate in the north and east of Nepal, where they migrated with all their flocks. South-western Nepal is inhabited by Brahmins and the Rajputs, considered to be a high caste, who emigrated from different parts of India (Sanwal, 1993, pp. 12-16). The Tharus and the Boksa are found in the Tarai and Bhabar areas. They call themselves Hindu, and Brahmins officiate in their religious ceremonies (Sanwal, 1993, p. 14). There is great cultural diversity here. People speak about sixty dialects, and there are more than twenty-four Tibeto-Burman dialects. Seventy-nine percent of the total population of Nepal in 1991 spoke an Indo-Aryan language (Regmi, 1999, p. 16).

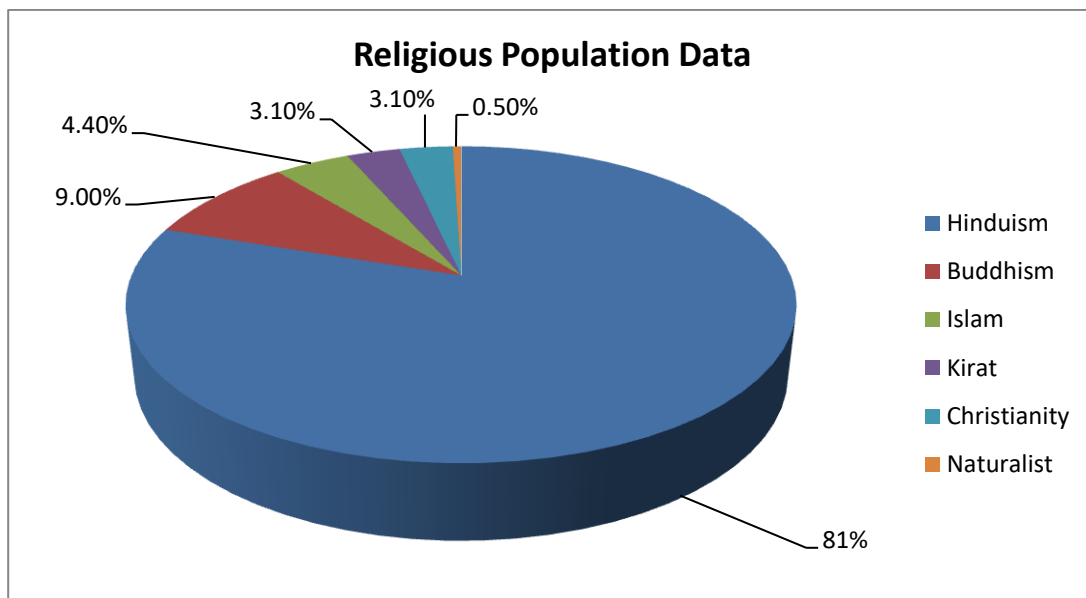
Figure No. 1



Source: Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), 2012. Kathmandu, Nepal

2.2.2 Religious Background

Figure No. 2



Source: Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), 2012. Kathmandu, Nepal

2.2.2.1 Hinduism

Nepal has been known historically as a Hindu¹ kingdom inhabited by Mongolians and Tibet-Burmans. It was the Aryans, however, who carried Hinduism into Nepal from north India and spread the religion and culture upon those Tibeto-Burman people. Due to this reason, even today, most of the Tibeto-Burman people identify themselves as Hindu, though in practice, their worship patterns, customs, beliefs, and understanding of God still based on animism, unlike the Aryan people.

The Aryan conquest of Indus happened around 1560BC, and the Aryans remained in constant conflict with the indigenous people in that region. Hindus also sought shelter in Nepal as they fled from the invasion of Muslims in northern India. As more Aryans entered Nepal, they brought the Hindu religion, social structure and had the most extensive influence among the indigenous people of Nepal in ancient history. Before 500BC, Nepal was inhabited only by indigenous ethnic groups and had no caste system. The Hindu Aryans came to Nepal and seized land from the indigenous Nepali people and repressed their native languages (Sundas, 2005, p. 66). They aggressively promoted the Hindu religion, and many indigenous groups adopted their social structure. They viewed the people in Nepal as culturally inferior and excluded them from rituals because they were ritually unclean. The Aryans put the structured caste system in place for social functioning and order. This, in turn, bred four significant castes: the Brahmins (the priestly caste), Kshatriyas (the warriors), Vaishyas (the aristocrats), and the Sudras (the laborers) (Sundas, 2005, p. 65). Additionally, there are classes of people who have animist beliefs and worship ancestors in their own way and traditions (Sanwal, 1993, pp. 24-25). Today, Nepal is not the Hindu Kingdom; however, its inhabitants are mostly classified as Hindus.

The status of the Hindu state identity changed dramatically on 14 September 2015 when Nepal's New Constituent Assembly (CA) rejected a proposal to recognize Nepal as a "Hindu" state formally. Instead, they officially voted to be a secular state. Shortly after the vote, hundreds of Hindu activists demonstrated in front of the CA building and had violent clashes

¹ No one can be considered the founder of Hinduism. Some historians trace the beginnings of Hinduism to their millennium BCE. Long before the birth of Jesus Christ nomadic tribes came to India and settled on the banks of rivers Indus, Ganges, and Brahmaputra. These tribes called Aryans (noble one) after their settlements new way of thinking began and later it became Hinduism (Regmi, 1999, p. 109)

with the police (Wagner, 2018). Hundreds of Hindu nationalist organizations and personnel campaigned for the CA to write “Hindu State” in the constitution. They warned that secularism would lead to the development of a Christian empire and destroy their eternal identity as a Hindu state. According to Wagner, “Hindu nationalists contend that Western imperialism adopts the ruse of secularism to open the door for Christian proselytization and conversion, which in turn facilitates the long-term subordination of Nepal to Western interests (Wagner, 2018).” In contrast, Hindu nationalists have been friendly with Buddhism and Muslim communities in the country since these religious groups have been separated from the group from the Hindu faith for many centuries. Currently, urbanization and migration from rural areas to cities have brought more religious harmony as Nepali people have adapted to cultural and linguistic exchanges and diversity.

2.2.2.2 Buddhism

Buddhism² stands as the second-largest religion in Nepal after Hinduism. The founder of Buddhism, Buddha, was born in Lumbini, Nepal. He enlightened, however, in Bodh Gaya (present-day Bihar, India), where he preached his teachings, which spread to South and East Asia over that period. The ancient pillar in Lumbini, established by Emperor Ashoka from India, is inscribed with the story of how Buddhism flourished outside of Nepal.

During the reign of the Kings, Buddhism flourished in terms of sending missionaries, buildings stupas, and developing Buddhist scriptures. King Anshuvarma sent his daughter Bhrikuti to marry a Tibetan royal to spread Buddhism in the land of Tibet and the surrounding area. Interestingly, a religious syncretism between Hinduism and Buddhism started during the same period as both Hindus and Buddhists participated in each other’s pilgrimages, deities, temples, and festivals. That practice continues today. There are, however, differences between the Buddhists and the Hindus in terms of their rituals, sacraments, festivals, ceremonies, celebrations, birth, marriages, and death (Sanwal, 1993, pp. 25-26).

² Buddhism originated by Siddhartha Gautam Buddha, a prince comes from the Shakya clan born about 563BCE at Lumbini near the frontiers of Bihar, inside Nepal (Regmi, 1999, p. 118). After his enlightenment, he came to be known as Buddha “enlightened one”. His main teaching is that human beings are responsible for their own salvation and pointed to an ideal of the holy life and they can solve their spiritual problems through their own self-support.

In the initial stage of Buddhism in Nepal, the clan of Buddha called Shakya migrated from Lumbini to Kathmandu valley. There they preached teachings of Buddha and influenced other Tibet-Burman ethnic groups like Tamang, Sherpas, Bhutia, and Newar mountain people from the border with Tibet to India. Since the existence of Buddhism and Hinduism in Nepal, both have been tolerated and respected almost equally by the Government rulers and society.

2.2.2.3 Islam

Islam is the third-largest religion (4.4 percent) in the country, according to the 2011 census, introduced to the land approximately during the 11th century. Muslims have been living in Nepal since before the Shaha dynasty when they entered into the country as traders and people in the business. Today, there are large Muslim communities in the Madhesh region, or Terai, in the lower part of the mountains along the southern border with India. The majority of the Muslims in Nepal are Sunni, though some are Shia. The majority of Islam group migrated from India, though some also came from Afghanistan and Iraq.

The Muslim communities have their own culture, traditions, languages, and religious identities that are distinct from Hinduism in terms of theological perspectives. Like other minority religious groups, Muslim communities in Nepal are vulnerable and have less political, financial, social, and educational opportunities than Hindus. Nevertheless, there is religious tolerance and harmony with Muslims in Nepal despite global media messages and stereotypes of Muslims as terrorists and religious radicals

2.2.2.4 Others

Hinduism has maintained the main religion of Nepal, followed by Buddhism and Islam, and other religions like Kirat and Shamanism (Rongong, 2012, p. 12). Overall, other religions are influenced by Hinduism in ways that show up in culture, traditions, and belief systems.

2.3 Cultural Background

2.3.1 Festivals

Nepal is the land of festivals, with at least one part of the kingdom celebrating a celebration every day of the year. Religious festivals are very popular with Nepalese people from all

castes and religions. These festivals have preserved the social customs, traditions, and economic well-being of the people of Nepal (Regmi, 1999, p. 128). Dashain³ considered the longest, and the most important festival of Nepal is celebrated throughout the country by all castes and creeds of Hindus and Buddhists. Dashain begins in late September to mid-October right after the end of the monsoon season. Another famous festival is Tihar⁴ (a day of victory over demons). Tihar is also called Panchak Yama⁵, the five days of celebration. On the first day, people worship a crow, a messenger of Yama. On the second day of Tihar, they worship the dog, a gatekeeper of Yama. The third day of Tihar is for the Laxmi puja, a cow in the form of the goddess. On that night, every person puts lights in their home and offerings for the goddess of wealth (Laxmi). The fourth day celebrates the bull ox that protects valuable animals from disease and accident. The last day is “BhaiTika⁶,” a day when sisters give their brothers Tika and also get gifts. It is a grand occasion for all sisters and brothers to renew their love and affection with the homes of their birth (Regmi, 1999, pp. 140-141).

2.3.2 Food and Drink

Rice is a typical food in every part of Nepal except in higher, hillier parts that are not easily accessed. People there have to content themselves with Indian corn, buckwheat, or millet, from which they make a rough kind of bread, and also a type of porridge known as dhenro (Sing, 1997, 80). Because of the climate in Nepal, all men and women of all castes and tribes eat the meat of goat, pork, chicken, and buffalo. Some people are vegetarians because of her/his personal preferences. The cow, however, is a sacred animal, and killing a cow is banned by the Nepali law. The Nepalese enjoy meat dishes, especially wild pig or goat. They

³ This festival celebrates the goddess Durga in her different forms, mainly in the form of Kali, the goddess of power. Dashain remembers the victories of the god and goddesses over the demons. It symbolizes the victory of the good over evil. Mahishasura, a demon, created terror in the dev-lok (the world of gods). All the gods and saints prayed to the Adigomin order to kill Mahishaura, and the goddess came as Durga to kill the demon, thus saving everyone from terror. The first nine days of Dashain symbolize the battle which took place between the different manifestations of goddess Durga and the demon Mahishasura. The tenth day is the day when Durga finally defeated Mahishasura. People celebrate the victory of goddesses Durga and worship her as divine and powerful goddesses.

⁴ Literally ‘Tihar’ means a row of lamps and lighting displays. Traditionally Tihar is a time to worship Laxmi (goddess of wealth) and a day to worship one’s own body or self. There is a myth that during this festival Laxmi circles the earth as an owl, inspects home to see that they have been cleansed and that lights have been left burning in her honor. If she is pleased, she will protect the money box and grain stores of each family and grant prosperity throughout the coming year (Regmi, 1999, p. 139).

⁵ Yama refers to the god of death, called Yamaraj.

⁶ Bhaitika refers to the worship of brothers by his sisters. It involves an exchange of blessings and best wishes for his longevity and future prosperity.

also prefer fowl, eggs, and fish. Potatoes and onions are common vegetables and tomatoes, peas, cauliflower, and cabbage are also used often in urban, village, and remote places (Sanwal, 1993, pp. 82-83). People also drink wine and beer made out of rice called Janr and Raksi.

At home, women are usually the ones who cook the food. Traditionally, the men eat first, and the woman eats what is left after the men have finished. Today, this practice is less common. Among the superior castes, like the Brahmins, they will not eat anything that was cooked or touched by someone from a lower caste (Sing, 1997, p. 81).

2.3.3 Marriage

The multi-religious and multicultural diversity in Nepal is present in the wedding rituals, customs, and traditions among different ethnic groups. In Nepal, there are different marriage practices like polygamy, arranged marriage, love marriage, forced marriage, and court marriage.

The system of arranged marriage is still dominant in the Nepali society because society is built on the importance of family. The man's parents usually ask the women's parents for their daughter to marry their son. The marriage broker or the mediator, who is called Lami, plays a vital role in uniting the two young people and their families (Khatiwada, 2008). A traditional wedding "involves a lot of music, dance, and singing, which begins as soon as the party leaves the bridegroom's home. The bride usually dressed in a red sari, with a matching veil covering her face. She is bedecked with gold jewelry- earrings, bangles, and necklaces" (Khatiwada, 2008).

The polygamy was a common practice in the past and religiously accepted in Hinduism. Hindu men were allowed to have multiple wives. Within a few ethnic groups, child marriage is practiced and accepted culturally, especially in Terai, the southern territory close to the Indian border.

2.4 Political and Economic Background

2.4.1 Political Conditions

Political instability is a significant problem faced by citizens of Nepal, whether directly or indirectly. As previously discussed, a democracy established during the reign of King Birendra after the Panchayat rule of his father, King Mahindra. Since the declaration of parliamentary democracy and constitutional Monarchy in 1990, the political situation has been tumultuous in the country. After the ten years of establishment of democracy became worse when King Birendra died in bloody gunfire at the royal palace on 1 July 2001 with his whole family and other royal members together (“World facts as quoted in Magar, 2005, pp. 11-12). After his death two days later, the following night’s King’s surviving brother crowned as a new King.

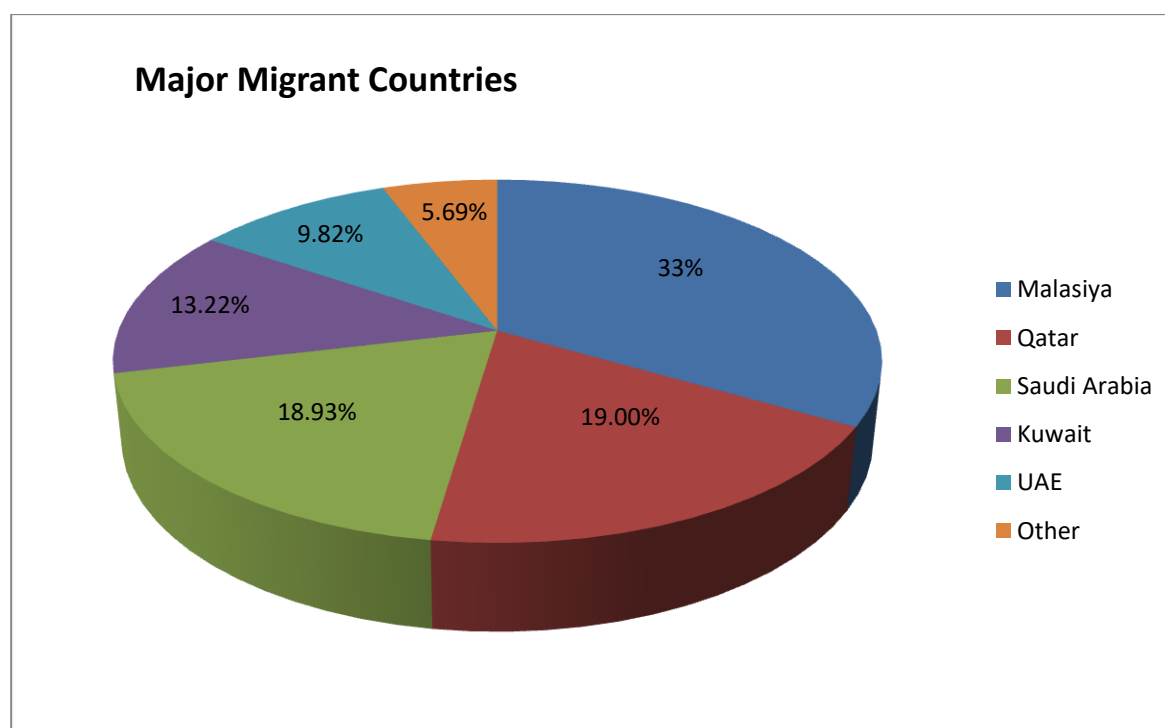
From February 1996, the communist party of Nepal (Maoist) began a violent insurgency in more than 50 of the country’s 75 districts under the leadership of Pushpa Kamal Dahal, also known as “Prachanda” and Dr. Baburam Bhattari. Ultimately, this armed conflict made lasting effects in the entire country until 2006. On 1 February 2005, King Gyanendra suspended the parliament and appointed a new government, giving himself full power. King Gyanendra argued that civil politicians were unfit to handle the Maoist insurgency. In April 2006, the seven-party alliance (SPA) of parliamentary parties and the communist party of Nepal led a countrywide uprising called the “Loktantra Andolan” against the royal takeover and autocratic rule by King Gyanendra. All the political forces in Nepal, including civil society and professional organizations, were fired up. This resulted in massive and spontaneous demonstrations across Nepal. The people’s participation was so extensive, and they demonstrated and protested continuously for 19 days.

On 23 December 2007, the Monarchy was eradicated from the throne, and the country became a federal republic with the Prime Minister as the head of the state. After the first election in 2008, the communist party of Nepal (CPN) became the largest party in Nepal. After almost seven years of struggles, the political parties agreed to establish the constitution in 2015. By 2017, local district elections were held in three different phases in May, June, and September, followed by provincial and national parliamentary elections held in November and December of the same year.

2.4.2 Economic Conditions

Nepal is one of the poorest and under-developed countries among the South Asian countries. Nevertheless, the country holds very high potential for economic development because of its natural resources and historical products, which can be used for the financial advantage of the country. Gunanidhi Sharma states that there is insufficient public support for economic transformation because of the proper government policies. One of the dominant commercial sources is agriculture, which contributes 40 percent of the country's GDP. Farming employs 80 percent of the labor force, whereas the industrial sector is in the beginning stage and provides less than 10 percent to the GDP (Sharma, 2002, p.37). Unfortunately, the second highest (almost 30 percent) of income comes from the remittance by foreign employment, mostly in the Middle East (E.g., Qatar, UAE, Saudi Arabia) and other countries like Malaysia, the US, and Europe.

Figure No: 3.



Source: MOLAE, Government of Nepal, 2016

An economic survey of Nepal (2014/2015) shows that approximately 500,000 young people are migrating to seek employment opportunities abroad to make money for their families. As a result, that migration increased remittance for the country instead of creating employment in

the country itself. That survey also states that a significant portion of income remittance has been used in consumption rather than being invested in productive sectors (MOF Government of Nepal, 2015). However, Nepal has considerable room for growth in hydropower, with an estimated 4,200 MW of potential capacity. Additionally, Nepal has abundant tourist attractions, like Mt. Everest and other Himalayan mountains, the birthplace of Buddha, and the Foundation of World Peace site. Nepal is rich in cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and geographic diversity and has a strong historical heritage that can help to boost the economic growth of Nepal.

Nepal still faces significant economic challenges, primarily due to political instability, which is a deterrent for foreign investment. Additionally, Nepal is a landlocked country, has labor unrest, civil strife, poor transportation access, and natural disasters. On top of that, a massive earthquake with a magnitude of 7.6 hit Nepal in 2015. The earthquake killed approximately 9,000 people and injured 24,000. It also destroyed thousands of homes, schools, hospitals, and other historical places. This natural disaster and the following reconstruction set back the economy of Nepal many years

During all the political, economic, and social-religious challenges, Nepalese churches have been surviving as an independent community since the 17th century. With many ups and downs, theirs is a journey of survival despite severe persecution and rejections from the government and local people. The following section is a short glimpse at the history of the Christian church in Nepal.

2.5 A brief study on the Background of Christianity in Nepal

2.5.1 First Arrival of the Gospel

Dr. Cindy Perry records the history of Christianity in Nepal in her book, *A Biographical History of the Church*. According to Perry, the first Nepali convert to Christianity was Michael, “the courageous, the warrior.” Records do not tell his Nepali name. This was during the mid-1700s. Michael was in Tibet, a high-caste young man from the valley of Nepal, who had a conversion in Lhasa by an Italian teacher” (Perry, 1996, p. 1). Some historical records are showing that the Roman Catholic Church sent some of the Capuchin fathers as missionaries via Nepal to Tibet. Only two fathers arrived in Kathmandu in 1707 during the reign of Malla Kings (Lindell, 1997, pp. 5-6). Cindy Perry states that two churches, complete with cemeteries, were built and dedicated on 24 March 1760 in Kathmandu near the Thamel

areas. A record shows that churches baptized about 80 adults, and among them conducted nine Christian marriages. Most of the members were Newar⁷ Christian baptized in Tibet (Perry, 1996, p. 7).

In the 17th century to the late 18th century, Christianity became visible for the first time through the presence of a Capuchin Father at the time when Nepal was still divided into scores of small states ruled by many kings. According to historian Surya Bikram Gyawali, there were twenty-two kingdoms in Karnali, twenty-four in Gandaki, and thirteen in the Kathmandu valley, where Rai and Limbu ethnic states in the eastern part makes fifty-four kingdoms in total (Rongong, 2012, p. 22). During the Malla reigns, they permitted Capuchin fathers in Kathmandu valley in 1715. These men were the first carriers of the Gospel into the Himalayan land.

During the rule of Prithivi Narayan Shah⁸, King of Gorkha, these missionaries were forced to leave. He suspected that the Capuchin fathers were foreign spies who had come when the King of Kathmandu sought help from the British in India. He also saw the Capuchin missionaries as representing and spreading European ideas and policies in addition to their religious beliefs (Rongong, 2012, pp. 26-27). On the other side, the Brahmins, the priestly caste, rose in resistance against the first Christians who came to Nepal. They saw the Christian faith as a threat to their religious establishment and place in society. As a result, all the fathers were banished from the country on 4 February 1769, with a group of 60 national Christians to Bettiah, north Bihar, India (Singh, 1997, p. 80). For the following two centuries, Nepal was closed to Christian presence and influences.

2.5.2 Close Lands for the Gospel

Dr. Simon Pandy states that:

“The King Prithivi Narayan Shah policy regarding foreigners and Christians was obligatory enforced. No foreigners were allowed to enter the country. This policy applied to traders, scientists, professors, and missionaries. Even Indians

⁷ Newar – one of the ethnic groups, living in Kathmandu valley since many centuries.

⁸ Prithivi Narayan Shahs, the king of Shahs to rule Nepal (1723-1775). He is credited for a starting the campaign for unified Nepal, which had been divided and weakened under Malla confederacy. He was the ninth generation descendant of Dravya Shah (1559-1570), the founder of the ruling house of Gorkha.

were not allowed to stay overnight in the country. By and large, Nepal became closed off from the rest of the world. Law forbade any sales of or use of the Bible. It was forbidden for Christians, whether foreigners or nationals, to live in the country. Nepal thus became a “closed land” for the Gospel of Jesus Christ for almost 200 years (Pandy, 2003 p. 21”).

During the crisis of Christian influence, the socio-political situation of Nepal was affected by the Nepal Tibet war (1787-1793)⁹ and the Anglo-Nepal War (1814-1816)¹⁰, which added the burden of a substantial tax from the government in their socio-economic life. As a result, thousands of Nepalese moved eastward, first into Darjeeling and Sikkim (West Bengal, India), then to the southern reaches of Bhutan, and into Assam and Burma (Myanmar) to search for jobs like the construction of railways and roads, tea plantation laborers, military posts, and factory workers (Perry, 1997, pp. 17-19). At that time, missionaries from abroad were at the borders between Nepal and China, waiting and praying for opportunities to enter Nepal and share the Gospel with Nepalese people. Meanwhile, as the Nepalese Christians continued to leave, they took their church traditions with them, and Nepal was closed to all Christian influences.

2.5.3 Border Evangelism

As we have discussed earlier, most Nepalese people remained unexposed to the Gospel until the church of Scotland began their mission activities near the Nepal border in Darjeeling¹¹ led by Rev. William Macfarlane in 1968 (Perry, 1997, p. 24). Under the Scotland

⁹ The war was initially fought between Nepalese and Tibetan armies because of a trade dispute related to a long standing problem of coins of bad alloy struck by Nepal for Tibet. However, the initial Nepalese success was moderating the Tibetans, who were under the suzerainty of China, escalated the war by involving the Chinese imperial force. The Nepalese were eventually driven out from all the occupied territories and were forced to sign a peace treaty.

¹⁰ The Anglo-Nepalese war also called as Gurkha War (1814-1816), was fought between the kingdom of Nepal and the British East India Company as a result of border disputes and ambitious expansionism of both the aggressive parties. The war ended with the signing of the Treaty of Sugauli in 1816, which surrendered around a third of Nepal’s territory to the British. The battle of Nalapani was the first battle of Anglo-Nepalese war which took place at Nalapanifort near Dehradum (now situated in India), which was placed under siege by the British between 31st October and 30th of November 1814.

¹¹ Darjeeling is a small town of West Bengal state in India. It is famous for tea plantation and known as Darjeeling tea. During the British colony, the hill of Darjeeling became famous for avoiding the hottest summer and building the resort station for vacations for officials. Later, they started tea plantation which open the opportunities for workers from Nepal. Thousands of Nepalese migrated there to work in tea farm and railway roads that are called now as “Gorkhas” and Darjeeling becomes the very important stations for Nepalese language, culture, literature, and bible translation.

mission church, Bhim Dal Dewan became the first Nepali convert into Christianity in Darjeeling. Following his footsteps, Ganga Parsad Pradhan became a second convert on 24 January 1875 (Perry, 1997, pp. 24-25). Eventually, he became the first ordained Nepali pastor, translator of the Nepali Bible, a pioneer in Christian literature, owner of the first Nepali press house, and founder of the Gorkha mission in the Himalayas (Bomzon, 2012, p. 63).

In the meantime, after the British revival in Europe in the late 18th century, the Wesleyan movement led to a modern missionary movement. As a result, several missions would have liked to enter Nepal. Still, they had to contend with working around the border areas like Jogbani, Raxaul, Nautanawa, and Rupaidiha because of the ban on Christian work inside the country (Gurung, n.d., pp. 3-7). Jonathan Lindell mentioned in his first letter home that the Nepal Border Fellowship (NBF) structured reality for better evangelism and unity among the borderline missionaries by organizing the conference (Lindell, 1997). This fellowship was a small group of people with both Nepalese Christians from Darjeeling and some border town missionaries who came during the late 1940s (Rongong, 2012, p. 50). There were a few mission organizations who worked at the border towns of India preparing to enter to the country, including the Assembly of God (AG), Baptist Mission Society (BMS), Church of Scotland, London Missionary Society (LMS), and World-Wide Evangelical crusades (Rongong, 2012, pp. 28-29). For the mission organization, it was an opportunity to share the Gospel to Nepalese nationals when they were at the border for various reasons like manual work, business, education, pilgrimage, and medical treatment. It turned into a huge border evangelism effort, ultimately leading to different house fellowships and cell churches.

2.5.4 The Rise of Democracy in Nepal and Entrance of the Gospel

After almost 100 years of Christian mission activities at the Nepal and India borders, the Christians were well prepared to enter into the land that was closed for two centuries. On 16 February 1951, King Tribhuvan took full powers and led the country into a democratic government system (Perry, 1997, p. 57). This government gave the assurance of fundamental rights, including freedom of religion, which opened the way for Christian missionaries to come into Nepal (Rongong, 2012, p. 51).

The political change in 1951 opened the doors of Nepal to the outside world, and international Christian missions started coming to the country. They were not allowed by the government to engage in religious activities but asked to help in the development and social transformation

(Thomas, 2011, p. 17) of Nepal. However, during the 1950s to 1960s, small churches began to grow in Kathmandu¹², Pokhara¹³, and Nepalganj¹⁴.

In 1940, a missionary called Hilda established the Nepal evangelical group at Nautanwa¹⁵, the same group of people that later started the Shining Hospital at Pokhara, which changed into the International Nepal Fellowship (INF). The first missionaries of this organization were Daniel Pradhan, David Mukhiand, and Tir Bahadur Dewan (Hale, 2012, pp. 42-45). While working at the hospital with missionaries Lily O’hanlon and Hilda, along with some Nepalese Christians, the “Ramghat” church established in 1952 under the leadership of David Mukhia, which became the first official church of Nepal (Gurung, n.d.).

On 31 October 1949, Dr. Rober Fleming got permission from the Nepal government to enter into the country to study birds of the Himalayas. As a result of this visit, they founded an organization called United Mission to Nepal (UMN) in 1994. It later turned into the most significant Christian aid organization that worked in the field of medical, education, livelihoods, hydropower, and rural development sectors (Kehrberg, 2004, pp. 14-16). As UMN started its medical work at Tansen¹⁶, they were able to start a church in 1959 with the help of some Nepalese Christians (Rongong, 2012, p.70). In the same year in 1954, St. Xavier School at Jawalakhel, Kathmandu, was officially opened and was the first mission school in the country. Within the same period, the Darjeeling ethnic group, called Karthak and Rongong, migrated to Kathmandu and started a church called Isai Mandali and led by Robert Karthak. This is now known as Gyaneshwar, the largest church in Nepal (Perry, 1990).

In 1959, the National Churches Fellowship of Nepal (NCFN, initially known as Nepal Christians fellowship) was established. This was the only organization that could bring all the churches together under one roof. The first president was Ps. David Mukhia. There is a saying that Arnest Oliver, the former national coordinator of UMN, played a vital role in starting NCFN (Khadkha, n.d. p. 63).

¹² Capital city of Nepal.

¹³ Second largest city of the country after Kathmandu, capital city.

¹⁴ Largest city in the far west and southern border with Inida, Uttar Pradesh.

¹⁵ A small town in Uttar Pradesh, India closed to the Indo-Nepal border in the southern part called Sonauli.

¹⁶ A small town of west Nepal, a district capital of Palpa district where UMN started a mission hospital.

On the other hand, Christianity spread not just by the people who entered Nepal for missions but also by the people who went to do military service in the British and Indian army. While Nepali were serving, they learned about, converted to Christianity, and returned home with new faith and zeal of service to Jesus (Thomas, 2011, p. 18).

From 1951 to 1989, Christianity in Nepal had been slowly growing at the same time when there was still persecution of Christians in the country. The Nepal government gradually opened the door for the mission to come in and to help only in the areas of health, education, development, technical training, and hydropower development. But there were not many changes in the constitution regarding religious activities such as preaching and conversion, which were constitutionally prohibited (NBBC, n.d. p. 11). Nevertheless, those missionaries and mission organizations continued to preach the Gospel to every person who came to hospitals, medical camps, or schools. During those years, the government imprisoned many believers and local house church leaders, and many house churches burned down. The church in Nepal went through a dark period until 1989. Then in 1990, the People's Revolution (known in Nepali as Janaandolan) rose against the Panchayat system and forced King Birendra to accept constitutional forms and to establish a multiparty democracy within the constitutional Monarchy. This brought tremendous change both in terms of politics and the Christian existence in the country (Thomas, 2011, p. 18).

2.6 Persecution and Denominational Growth

After the entering of the Gospel, the number of conversions and growth of the churches was significant. Nevertheless, the partial democratic government continued to prohibit the religious conversion from Hinduism to Islam and Christianity. The statement of legal code 1935 explained the prohibition of conversion:

“To who preaches faith opposed to the national religion of the kingdom, to who causes to abandon one absolute religion to adopt, or forced to adopt, the following punishment will be implemented: in the entire kingdom of Nepal, practicing and preaching Christian religion or Islam and any other outsider or foreign beliefs and conversion which destroys the national religion- Hinduism, is strictly prohibited and considered as a criminal (Legal Code of Nepal, 1935)”.

Due to this legal code, early Christian communities went under severe persecution from the government and the local communities. From 1958 to 1990, the government arrested many Christian leaders, like Pastor David Mukhia, Prem Pradhan, and six other believers who were imprisoned for six and one years, respectively. By the end of 1990, there were more than 200 people subjected to proselytism, and 30 others put into prison. Despite this, the fastest church growth in the country happened during this period of persecution. Later in 2007, the provisional constitution allowed the freedom to practice religions. Despite all the internal and external pressures and persecution of local communities and the government administration, the number of Christians increased to 1.4% of the total population (Nepal Central Bureau of Statistics, 2011). This result was surprising for the whole country, and it encouraged the Christian community to grow more.

Eventually, the Christian churches consolidated under one umbrella called the NCFN. Before the establishment of the NCFN, there was no doctrinal barrier to divide them. It was like one denomination among many. Around 1995, however, the efforts of NCFN and other denominations to stay under one umbrella failed. The NCFN broke into many denominations throughout the country. Today, there are many denominations; for example, Lutheran, Baptist, Methodist, Pentecostal, Assembly of God, El-Shaddai, Presbyterians, Conservative Baptist, Evangelical, and hundreds of independent churches. The independent churches don't belong to any particular denomination or mission organization (NCFN, n.d.). In the past 20 years, more denominations are coming up with more mission and evangelism projects. Most of them are under the leadership of Nepalese and few from foreigners.

2.7 Current Socio-Cultural Status of Christianity

Nepal is a home for multi-ethnic, multi-religion, multicultural, multi-linguistic, multi-traditional people and communities. The religious landscape is not a monoculture but has diverse theist and animist traditions. Over the 50 years that Christianity came and spread in Nepal, Nepalese Christians were living as a minority community within the pluralistic religious communities of Nepal. It was the case even after the declaration of 'free religion practice' by the Republic Government constitution. Theologians Jonathan Y. Tan and Amos Young, agree that there is excellent religious pluralism in the Asian context and so Asian Christians are quite diverse (Tan, 2014, p. 95). In the midst of religiously pluralistic societies like Nepal, it is challenging for Christians to claim an exclusive religious worldview.

Sometimes these Christians experience isolation from the family, friends, and community because accepting Christianity is viewed as a foreign religion or religion of white people. Some people accuse Christians of selling their ethnic religion for money from a foreign land.

Nepalese Christians, however, continue to practice their faith despite bearing rejection, isolation, persecution, and political repression. The current social and cultural pressures on Christians can be harsh if new Christians have to renounce their family, culture, and identity.

2.8 Chapter Summary

Surrounded by two giant nations, India and China, the Himalayan country Nepal is a place where 330 million gods have existed. The numbers of gods and goddesses are 12 times larger than the country's population. In the 17th century, the first Christian Father came to Nepal and started preaching the Gospel as a guest in the country. He was forced to leave the country and Nepal was closed to Christians for almost two centuries. Eventually, Christians brought the Gospel back into Nepal, where they experienced persecutions, discriminations, and a lot of hard work as pioneers on the Indo-Nepal borders. History shows that the Nepalese diaspora communities also contributed tremendously to the establishment of the church in the initial period.

After 200 years of a dark age for Christianity in Nepal, God opened the door for missions in Nepal in 1950. Now the churches are growing faster. At the same time, many challenges are arising as churches grow and adapt to cultural practices. Sometimes they are accused of converting poor and low caste people into Christianity through aid work and charity. Despite all these negative accusations, CB Ghatraj, the President of the Federation of National Christian in Nepal (FNCN), said that there is a record number of Christians in Nepal. 300,000 out of 12,000 churches were established within the last 67 years (Ghatraj, 2017). Nepalese churches have been growing as a diverse community with positive and negative influences on society. The most positive impacts are that the church treats Dalit and outcaste people equally, unlike the general society that often discriminates based on caste. In this way, they are showing an example of how to be a peacemaker and nonviolent in society. At the same time, the Christian community often boycotts significant festivals like Dashain, Tihar, and other minor ones, which leads people to think they hate their own culture and traditions. Overall, the history of Christianity in Nepal witnesses the most dramatic political and religious

changes, growth, and progress within the context of severe persecution, rejection, prejudice, and isolation from the government and society. It has, and I believe, will remain strong and continue to grow and spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the days to come.

3 Chapter Three: Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the methodological strategy, theoretical framework, research motivation, and reliability and validity of the research. At the end of the episode, it deals with ethical concerns, focus groups, research structure, data collection methods, and research sampling of the entire process of research methodology.

The research methodology based on empirical and qualitative methods. A literature review conducted from library sources. Then the researcher conducted interviews and field research. It included interviews with first Baptist missionaries (Nepalese and foreigners), NBCC former and current board members, Baptist church leaders, and first-generation Christians in Nepal. For those who are not available for an interview, the researcher has contacted them either by sending questionnaires or telephone calls. The researcher covers the data analysis, sampling, and limitation of the research or focus groups with the reliability of research and ethical boundaries.

This research-based on qualitative methods because it relies on interviews with informants based on their own social and cultural settings. Bryman (2012) states that qualitative research methods are promising because of their flexibility and how structural frameworks do not bound them as strict as quantitative research methods.

3.2 Research Sampling

The sampling method in qualitative research is selected based on the informants like people, organizations, and departments and the research questions. According to Bryman, in qualitative research, the sampling of subjects has a noticeable influence on the fieldwork. The sampling of areas and then participants is a common strategy in qualitative research” (Bryman, 2012, p.417). This research uses ‘snowball sampling’ throughout the project because I found this method is the most applicable for my research.

Alan Bryman (2012) explains that “snowball sampling is a technique in which the researcher samples an initial group of people relevant to the research questions, and these sampled participants suggest other participants who have the experience or characteristics relevant to the research” (Brayman 2012, p. 424).

The researcher looks for informants who are easily accessible and know other informants. The primary informants were people who knew about the origin, establishment, and growth of Nepal Baptist Church Council in Nepal. Because the researcher grew up in a Baptist church community, it is easy to access leaders, pastors, NBCC board members, mission directors, non-profit staff, regional secretaries, and foreign missionaries to interview. Other informants might include essential persons who have in-depth knowledge of NBCC’s history. Because the research design uses snowball sampling, some informants are currently unknown at the beginning of writings. But now, all informants are known and mentioned in the interview references.

3.3 Data Collection Methods

One of the most important aspects of qualitative research is the choice of data collection methods. There is a range of potential data collecting methods available, like various forms of interviews, observations, electronics, textual, visual or non-visual data analysis. Gathering data from a range of sources, skills, interpretations, and methods help to obtain reliable and authentic findings and complete the research questions (Ritchie, Lewis & Nicholls, 2013, p. 53). According to Silverman (2011), which research method the research chooses depends on the research topic. Methods in themselves have no intrinsic value.

To answer the research questions, data generated by in-depth interviews, various forms of discussion, and observations. Apart from in-depth interviews, telephone calls and questionnaires are used to create the data from informants, depending on the demand and circumstances.

3.3.1 Interview

The interview is the most commonly used method in qualitative research. Qualitative interviews are flexible, include open-ended questions, and are encouraging and refreshing

because it usually comprises unstructured conversations that highlight what the informant thinks is relevant and essential.

For my research, I conducted one-on-one in-depth interviews to collect independent data (already existed) and generate data (created through the interaction between researchers and respondents). Creswell (2014) mentioned that one-on-one in-depth interviewing is a process where a researcher holds face-to-face interviews with the informants. They are useful when the informants cannot directly observe but allow researcher control over questioning, and informants can provide historical information.

I conducted several one-on-one interviews with founding members of NBCC, former and present executive board members, pastors, leaders, lay members, regional directors, non-profit managers, and Bible school staff and students. It led me to get the depth of the historical development of NBCC. Besides, the researcher collected information from foreign missionaries, World Baptist Alliances (WBA), an international non-profit pioneers to explore more sources regarding NBCC and the Nepal Church history as a whole. Additionally, some interview respondents are women leaders and women church members to explore the women's roles and status within the NBCC organization. Lastly, I found more interview respondents apart from the personnel mentioned above, who discovered during the snowball sampling process.

3.3.2 Observation

Observation has been a dominant method in ethnographic qualitative inquiries. As described by Ritchie and friends, ethnography involves an understanding of communities, groups, or settings through detailed investigation of the cultural norms, beliefs, and characteristic behaviors (Ritchie et al., 2013, p. 244). Therefore, to generate the data, ethnographers immerse themselves by systematically observing their surrounding communities, which include their actions, rituals, behaviors, dialogue, festivals, exchange of language, and interactions. Creswell (2014) states that observation helps researchers to get the first-hand experience by informants while interviewing or to immerse themselves in the community. It also allows researchers to record the information as it occurs and generate the data while discussing and exploring the topics. Likewise, I preferred interviewing the respondents in

their respective places, like church and ministry locations, so that I can see and observe the authenticity and reliability of the generated data.

Figure 1: This table shows the level of familiarity of the history of the NBCC by the founder members, present board members, and lay church members of NBCC.

Interviews: R: (Respondent)	Sex (F: Female; M: Male)	Level of understanding about NBCC/ Involvement with NBCC (Fair, Good and Excellent)	Designation/Role with NBCC and sub - Departments	Place
R1	Male	Excellent	Founder President and Senior Pastor: Itahari Baptist church	Itahari, East Nepal
R2	Male	Excellent	Founder Secretary & Senior Pastor; Dhapasi Baptist Church	Kathmandu
R3	Male	Excellent	Former Secretary; NBCC	Kathmandu
R4	Female	Good	Former Secretary; NBWF	Kathmandu
R5	Male	Fair	Founder member of NBCC	Itahari, East Nepal
R6	Male	Good	Former Executive Director; MCDS	Kathmandu

R7	Male	Excellent	Former Principal, NBBC	Kathmandu
R8	Male	Excellent	Former President; NBYF	Kathmandu
R9	Male	Fair	Founder Treasure	Itahari, East Nepal
R10	Male	Fair	Founder Member	Itahari, East Nepal
R11	Male	Fair	Mission Director	Kathmandu
R12	Female	Good	Church members	Pokhara
R13	Female	Fair	Church members	Biratchock, East Nepal
R14	Female	Fair	Women leader	Kathmandu
R15	Male	Good	Pastor	Itahari
R16	Female	Fair	Women Leader	Itahari

I have chosen the informants based on their knowledge and working experiences with NBCC, as seen in Figure No 1. A few respondents are the founding pioneers of NBCC, who have taken the initiative to establish the organization as the first Baptist council in Nepal. Some respondents are young leaders who were mentored by the pioneer leaders and who later worked with NBCC to develop the organization. Among them, there are female respondents as well, who are the most crucial church members and leaders to contribute a lot to the growth of NBCC as an organization. My significant research covered by these responders' responses and generated data through in-depth interviews and observations.

3.4 Focus Group

The focus group method developed during the mid-twentieth century for market research programs. Now, this method has become one of the mainstream methods for qualitative research for social scientists. According to Ritchie and friends, focus group discussions are a different way of in-depth interviewing that generates data through interactions between group participants. Participants present their views and experience, but they also hear from other people (Ritchie et al., 2013, p.212). Bryman (2012) states that the purpose of focus group discussions is to explore specific themes or topics in-depth (Bryman, 2012. p. 501).

In this research, my focus group respondents are from different districts of Nepal. It is because, in the process of growing Baptist churches, they were scattered in various locations within the country and outside the country as well. First, the selection of focus groups based on their experience, knowledge, involvement, and contribution to the growth of NBCC and its different departments (Region, mission, Bible College, and non-profit). The researcher focused on the top leaders of NBCC who have closely worked with NBCC. Secondly, informants were chosen from different Baptist churches (lay members, women, and pastors) to discuss the role, impact, influences, transformation, equality, and transparency of NBCC to affiliated churches in rural and urban areas.

Lastly, some respondents are first-generation Christians and leaders from eastern parts of Nepal and the Kathmandu Valley. They are missionaries, professors, pastors, social workers, and Bible school teachers who have been witnessing the growth of the Christian faith in Nepal since the 1950s after the establishment of democracy.

3.5 Data Transcription, Interpretation, Analysis and Reporting

Burke (2012) states that the transcription and analysis process of data includes accumulating the transcribed raw text and organizing it into specific categories, themes, sub-themes, titles, and descriptions. The analyzed data can consist of all that was collected by a voice recorder, field notes, interviews, and questionnaires. All the meaningful and sound data that is relevant to the research hypothesis. According to Bruke (2012), all the data should be transcribed, coded, and organized into themes, coded segments and develop categories so that it will be easy to interpret and describe the right understanding and meaning of the phenomenon

According to Ritchie et al., only careful analysis of relevant data should lead to a final report. It is vital to have a thorough review of data, coherent interpretations, and clear explanations of the major themes of the research. It ensures a relevant report of qualitative research outcomes.

3.6 Research Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity are two components that are very important in qualitative research to ensure the authenticity, trustworthiness, and credibility of the study itself. The concept has developed in the natural sciences but later was extended to qualitative research methods to examine its credibility of the whole research process. According to Ritchie and other editors, reliability refers to the ‘replicability’ of a study’s findings. Would we get the same research results again from repeated research projects using the same research methods and research design? Validity refers to whether or not conclusions and phenomenon studied are well-founded or accurately presented (Ritchie et al., 2013, p. 354). There is an internal debate going on about the different nature of social science research and whether or not replication is possible. Whether or not perfect replication is possible, it is still important to consider reliability and validity in qualitative research to strive for authenticity, credibility, and accuracy.

This research project is based on historical accounts and most of the data collected through oral interviews with informants who are directly and indirectly involved with the development and growth of NBCC inside and outside of Nepal. Therefore, the researcher didn’t go out from the selective focus group to keep the research focused and credible. By conducting interviews with the informants in a confidential setting, the data reflects the accurate phenomenon of the research questions.

3.7 Research Ethics

According to Alan Bryman, universal ethical precepts should never be broken. Infractions of ethical principles are wrong in every moral sense and are damaging to social research (Bryman, 2012, p. 133). That means it is essential that research should be undertaken in an ethically sound manner.

In this research, the researcher follows the ethical principles regarding informants’ confidentiality and pays respect for their opinions. No information provided by informants

would be misused or reused without permission. In the Meantime, the participant gets informed in advance about research purposes, their role, rights, as well as responsibilities as a researcher. The interviewee is free to choose their comfortable environment to talk with the researcher, follow their schedule, and refuse to answer any question. Before taking or using any photographs, videos, or making a printing material, the participants are asked permission to publish. Most importantly, the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants will be assured, and the data will be kept safe. Lastly, the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD) has informed about the research and after approval data collection started and other relevant resources as well.

3.8 Chapter Summary

The second chapter summarizes the methodological framework of the research project. This chapter helped me obtain the answers to research questions by using the data collection and analysis methods mentioned above. Most importantly, the methodology chapter played a significant role in planning and executing this research project, in terms of obtaining a deeper understanding of NBCC pioneers and leaders, seeing their involvement in the development process and their contribution to the Baptist denomination in Nepal.

4 Chapter Four: Theoretical Approaches

4.1 Introduction

This chapter deals with the theoretical application of this research project. This chapter is divided into two sections. The first deals with the definition and development of historical writings in the past by various scholars and historians. The second section deals with the oral theory presented by Lynn Abrams's book called "*Oral History Theory*," and considering the ethnographic understanding of writing historical studies through oral tradition. This chapter explains the background of historical writing accounts based on historiographical methods based on oral theory.

4.2 Definition and Development of History and Historiography

Descriptions of history explain and clarify the meaning of a term. It helps us to have a better understanding of the dynamics and usage of a given word or phrase. In general, history refers to everything that has happened.

In most cases, history constitutes what we know about or what people wrote about the event. It can be understood as a past that was carefully researched. In other words, history is more than collecting facts and figures about events; but there is also a reflective and philosophical dimension to it. History is a systematic inquiry on human existence in their proper cultural context, through the critical study and thoughtful analyses of relevant sources, with a view of a better understanding of humanity and society.

4.2.1 History

The word “history” can mean either what has happened, i.e., the historical process, or what people wrote about what has occurred, i.e., the historical writings (Frykonberg, 2001, p. 5). It was in the former sense that Robert Eric Frykenberg defined history as “all things that now exist and ever exist (Frykeberg, 2001, p. 25).” However, it is not always that we know everything about what has happened. In most cases, history constitutes what we know about or what people wrote about the event. Thus, history reflects as “what scholars write about the past after careful research.

An Indian Christian historian, F. Hrangkhuma, defined history as “mainly a study of people and of groups and societies which they have formed. It is a study of what they have thought, felt, said, and done (Hrangkhuma, 1996, p.5). Similarly, Shiek Ali defined history as “the record of those events which indicate the growth of man’s mind, man’s intelligence, and how he used them to discover better ways of living and to build up orderly societies which we call civilization or culture (Ali, 1996, p. 7). As such, history is an attempt to understand people and their civilization or culture. It was in this sense that Martha Howell and Walter Prevenier noted that history “helps provide meanings that make culture (Howell & Prevenier, 2001, p. 1). History, therefore, can be understood as a study of people in their cultural context.

Etymologically, the word “history” derived from the Greek, *historia*, meaning, “inquiry” (Sharma, 2005, p. 5). Therefore, as David Bebbington noted, history “demands a critical

frame of mind.” And is in this sense, in which “history is scientific” (Bebington, 1976, p. 4). However, a question has been raised concerning the validity of history as a science. Whereas science deals with facts which can be subject to observation and experimentation, historical data are not available for scientific observation and experimentation (Kochhar, 2001, p. 8). Thus, history is not science in the classical sense of being subject to observation and experiment; instead, it is a science in that “it is a critical inquiry of truth” (Bebington, 1976, p. 5). More specifically, ‘it is scientific in bases.

British historian R.G. Collingwood defined history as “a science whose business is to study events not accessible to our observation and to study these events inferentially” (Collingwood quoted by Arnold Toynbee, 1946, p. 1). Unlike other science, there is a considerable distance of time between the historian and their subject matter (Bebington, 1976, p.3). Moreover, evidence or sources in the historical study are insufficient and fragmented. Therefore, history involves not only a critical analysis of the evidence at hand but also a reflective analysis of these pieces of evidence to reconstruct the event inferentially. “Events of history,” says Collingwood, “are the things which historian looks at, not at, but through, to discern the thought within” (Collingwood, 1946, P. 214). In other words, history is more than collecting facts and figures about events; but there is also a reflective and philosophical dimension to it.

With inferences from the above discussions, a working definition stated in the following summary; history is a systematic inquiry on human existence in their proper cultural context, through the critical study and reflective analysis of relevant sources, with a view of a better understanding of humanity and society. In order to make history, there should be a written process known as historiography.

4.2.2 Historiography

Etymologically, the word “historiography” comes from the Greek words, *historia*, “history” and *graphein*, “to write.” Thus, earlier, the term “historiography” refers to “the writing of history.” Consequently, historians and historiographers, so also history and historiography, were considered as identical (Montgomer & Warwick, 1975). An example of such understanding is found in the definition by Chhaya Bhattacharjee, whereby he defined “historiography as the writing of history is following objective methods in the collection of materials and facts.

Today, however, the term “historiography” is used in a more specialized sense. It refers not to the study of history as such, but as Ali stated, refers to “the history of history” or even to “the history of historical thought” (Shek Ali, 1996, p.179). Conal Furay and Michael J. Salevouris define historiography as the study of the way history has been and is written”. It is not a direct study of “the events of the past.” But of “the changing interpretation of those events in the works of individual historians” (Furay & Salevouris, 1998, p. 223). To explain, it is the study and assessment of historians and their approaches and interpretations. It has, as Frykenberg noted, to do with “what people have themselves done to understand the past and what people have not done to gain an understanding of events (Frykonberg, 2001, p.6).

Historiography, therefore, has to do with understanding the historians’ perspectives, biases, and elements of selectivity that influenced their interpretation and writings of history. It can, therefore, be defined as an inquiry into the way histories were written through the study of the method and approaches of the historian involved, their understanding, and analyze how they have understood history over the years.

4.2.3 Development of Historiography

Historiography or the history of history was a product of the modern era. However, the idea of consideration of earlier historical writing was no new. The first step towards an account of earlier historical writings came in the work of Polybius (ca. 200-118 BCE) when he reviewed and criticized the methods and results of previous antiquarian writings on Roman history (Barnes, 1963, p. 399). He belongs to a category of people known as the reviewers, who reviewed the papers of early historians. However, the first notable crop of books that can, in any literal way, be regarded as histories of historical writings was promoted by the editors, whose work usually guided to the sources of national history.

An example is that of the small guide to German historical writings issued by Friedrich Dahlmann in 1830, *The Source of German History*” (Barnes, 1963, p. 400). The reviewers and editors were, therefore, the antecedents of modern historiography. But as Harry E. Barnes noted, “they were only incidentally histories of history (Barnes, 1963, p.400). What is new about the development in the modern era was the emergence of historiography as a specialized branch of historical study.

The modern era began in about the 16th century, immediately following the renaissance early days of the contemporary era span through the scientific revolution of the 17th century and the enlightenment of the 18th century. Thus, the revolutionary ideas of the renaissance, the scientific revolution, and the enlightenment, played a significant role in the development era on the development of historiography were threefold;

First, the secularization of history; in the middle age, history was a “handmaid of theology.” And historians “were mainly interested in discovering and explaining the divine plan in history (Kochhar, 2001, p. 5). The renaissance introduced a humanist approach with its sharp focus on humanity, which bracketed out god(s), the supernatural and elements of myth from the realm of history (Sreedharan, 2004, pp. 79-83). Thus this new approach to history was rationalistic and secular. The result was that different philosophies of history emerged that questioned the earlier treatment of history as a record of God’s divine providence.

Second, the emphasis on objectivity in the historical study: the idea of objectivity in historical research was not new. It traced back as far as the Greek historian of 5th century BCE, Thucydides (ca. 460-396BCE), who proposed that the aim of history writing must be to seek historical truth. However, the post-renaissance period opened new debates on this issue. Rene Descartes (1596 to 1650 CE), a French philosopher, for instance, raised doubt over the objectivity of historical writings by accusing that “the things which they [the historians] describes never happened as they describe them precisely (Descartes, as quoted in Collingwood, the idea of history, p. 59). However, not all were skeptics. Vico (1668-1744), for instance, opposed the problem of skepticism raised by historiography in turn of a critical approach to history as earlier historical works critiqued and new paradigm developed. Consequently, there was a renewed interest in recording and subsequent construction of accounts. Thus, the twentieth-century development of historiography as a specialized branch of historical study has movement significance towards a critical approach to history.

Every human being belongs to a culture that tells the stories about their past; for example, stories of their ancestor’s bravery, heroism, gods, superstitions, animals, food, and sacred rituals. These stories and grow as each generation passes the memories without any writing or record. In those stories, people find the truth, fact, and authentication as the stories are told again and again. This is what we call history, and it contains the account of human cultures,

their way of thinking, and feelings of the human past. Sometimes this history recorded in letters, journals, laws, administrative writings, poems, songs, and creed.

On the other hand, many human stories and cultures are unwritten. Thus oral history plays a role in preserving memories. Oral history is essential for the successful transmission of stories. The following is a look at the importance of oral traditions in writing the history of NBCC and using oral communication as a tool for exploring the Nepal Baptist Church pioneer's memories as the primary source for this research.

4.3 The Oral History Theory: Interpretative Models and Theoretical Approaches

4.3.1 Definition

According to the Oral History Association, "it is the field of academic research study and a method of gathering, preserving and interpreting the voices and memories of people, communities, and participants in past events" (Oral History Association, 2019). So likely, Lynn Abrams also describes oral history as a practice, a method of research. It is the act of recording the speech of people with something interesting to say and then analyzing their memories of the past (Abrams, 2010, p. 1). She considers that making oral history is a practice, not just obtaining information that leads to theoretical innovation. Although the methods of doing oral history have changed in a few decades with multidisciplinary, multi-vocal, multi-approaches, and the movements are distant compared to the twenty-first century and the post- II world war oral history fields? Generally, oral history exists in four types of form: oral interview recorded interview, written transcribed, and the interpretation of the interview materials. All these forms guide construct stories from the past and present as a history of voices of memories.

On the other hand, according to Donald Ritchie has mentioned in his book called *Doing Oral History*, "Oral History collects memories and personal commentaries of historical significance through recorded interviews. For oral history interview, there must be a well-prepared questionnaire and exchange of audio or video format. All the recordings from the interview should be transcribed, summarized, or indexed and then sited in a library or archives, which could be useful for further research. Oral history doesn't include any random video or audio

taping, nor does it refer to recorded speeches, personal dairies or tape, or another sound recording unless lack of the dialogue between interviewer and interviewee” (Ritchie, 2015, p.1). In the process of obtaining information, it is not just collecting someone's past stories, but it demands to comprehend not only what he/she said, but also why it said, how it is delivered, and what does that mean? Therefore, in order to follow those insightful practices demands theoretical innovation. I would like to present the following sections about oral history theory based on the Lynn books called “Oral History Theory” with significant interpretation and appropriate meanings of research. The following presented tools are the commonly practiced methods of doing oral history, which has been used and tested in different academic fields such as sociology, ethnology, anthropology, psychology, and many more.

4.3.2 Memories

There is a saying “memories are living histories” (Perks & Thomson, 2004, p. x). While doing oral history, there are four things that the interviewer will ask questions to discover: what happened, how they felt about it, how they recall it, and what broader public memory they draw upon it. Memory and process of remembering the past is the central heart of oral history (Abrams, 2010, p. 78). But memory is not always considered as past events or experiences instead, and it is a process of recalling the images, stories, experience, and emotions of previous life by placing them in narration and stories within the social and cultural context. However, it is not always about the individual; but it expresses about the community and nation collectively. At the same time, there is always a question for the reliability of memories and interpretation and re-interpretation of past events in terms of reliable objective or measurable terms. Still, it has ever told the truth value and acknowledges the fact of the past.

For doing oral history, memory theory stands as one of the disciplines to exercise any kind of historical research. For example, as practicing oral history, memory is considered as a key to self-identity or self-existence in a particular culture or social context. According to the very famous philosopher, Umberto Eco, “our memory of the past is essential to our ability to construct a sense of self; in other words, our identity grounded in our memory of the past” (Eco was quoted in Abrams, 2010, p. 82). Abrams mentions a different kind of memory system, which signifies here not only personal memories but the memories of a generation that helped create the history and history of people.

- a) Semantic memory: a system of memory that deals with factual information. i.e., names, places, facts, not only individual emotion.
- b) Procedural memory: a memory system that deals with the learning skills and habits of each individual.
- c) Episodic memory: it deals with recalling specific events, incidents, and ceremonies that lead to remember not only the stories but the factual places and people. It is considered a biographical memory.
- d) Flash-Bulb memory: a memory which is also called a vivid memory that doesn't show a clear picture of events instead remembers vivid and unclear memory.

Above all, the theory of memories works for different groups of individuals, communities, and nations, regardless of cultural context unless the intention is contrary or motivated for the wrong cause. In conclusion, the application of memory theory has been applied effectively in historical research and various frameworks. It helps to remember each individual or collectives has a way they remember and recall their past. The quote of Valerie Yow says, "as historians, we can work only with the memories that can be translated into words and thereby made conscious" (Yow quoted into Abrams, 2010, p. 103). It is not just a source but how narrators interpret their experience into words as well.

4.3.3 Self

Doing oral history, when respondents tell his/her life stories and all the experience of past shows directly or indirectly telling about him or herself. According to Abrams in an interview, each respondent is g

iven opportunities to share their story and experiences that reveal their present sense of self. In other words, the narrator always tries to dig in a more profound way to assemble and reflect their inner self to gather information and sources as it was aimed. As a result, the study of the self leads not only knowing a whole person but opens the way of studying his/her culture, society and religion, because it is the only way that opens the window to see their life and culture which shapes our lives (Abrams, 2010, pp. 33-34).

The theory of self-works as an instrument for oral history by producing expression of a self and facilitating the shape of a sense of self to the narrator via telling the life stories. This theory about self considers one way of theoretical positions that leads to self-narration, which at the end translates into oral history and becomes a piece of history. Therefore, self-narration is one of the best ways to construct and express the sense of self of every individual about their existence socially, feeling of being well, stable, functional, acceptable, productive, and coherent. These self-feelings are an essential sense that presents the presence of oneself. For that reason, the theory of self helps oral historians to explore every individual's memories through the self-narration by establishing the relationship of past and present events in the coherent chronological way about himself/herself concerning other people. Abrams presents the application of self-theory on making oral history is self is always and continually socially constructed in a series of relationships, social world, and another version of the self. This self-narration (life story) is a linguistic creation that serves to bring about coherence and composure to make sense of life (Abrams, 2010, p. 46). Eventually, this sense of stories becomes a history through oral communication. The difficult task for doing oral history practice is to find common ground for self-reflexivity is essential or self-indulgent whether our job is to document factors or interpret the meanings (Sheftel & Zembrzycki, 2013, p. 15). There is always a big debate on both sides of these issues from the scholar's point of view. Mostly, there are still possibilities to fall into biasness and wrong interpretation of the meanings if we have negative attitudes for the research. Some researchers focus on more personnel insights while others look through more emotion, ethics, worldview, or interest of the subjects.

4.3.4 Narratives

The term narrative has become an essential aspect of doing oral history. A narrative is one of the ways by which people make sense of experience and communicate it to others. A narrative is an ordered account created out of disordered materials of human experiences. It fundamentally recalls the experiences of our daily lives and past events. Barbara Hardy's words "we dream in narrative, day-dream in the narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticize, construct, gossip, learn, hate and love by narrative. To live, we make up stories about ourselves and others, about the personal as well as the human past and future" (Hardy was quoted in Abrams, 2010, p. 106). Narratives help to

create the stories and analyze and interpret our daily lives, place, culture, and life. It is the primary means of communication, a way people use language to communicate their experiences, knowledge, and emotions (Abrams, 2010, p.109).

The concept of narratives theory has been used by oral historians since the disciplines of narratives apply to language and communication as oral history primarily depends on spoken words and texts. Therefore, narratives contain the chronological order of life stories and experiences, which might be the form of a speech, fairy tales, memories, folktale, and daily based conversation. Therefore, narratives theory has been applied for developing oral history research, and it pays attention to produced narration through interviews and interpreted texts. In this case, oral historians should provide facilities in a way that makes a comfortable zone for respondents to help recall their real experiences and stories as they translated into words. Any form of narration would be helpful for oral historians by getting into beneath the particular events, experiences, and stories. Top of all, the essential methods for narration theory is a proper communication strategy of narrators, which helps to bring the most critical aspects from the respondents that would be the primary resource materials for the research topics.

4.3.5 Interviews

The essential methods of making oral history are the product of an interview with the help of a narrative account of past events (Abrams, 2010, p. 2). Over the past sixty years, oral history- ‘they interviewing eye-witness participants in the events of past for historical reconstruction’ – has transformed the practice of contemporary history in many countries (Perks & Thomson, 2004, p. 1). The interview helps to collect diverse information and resources as the researchers intended to do or aimed to do and develop as a written history of people, cultures, and nations.

In “Oral history off the Record: Towards an Ethnography of Practices” by Anna Sheftel and Stacey Zembrzycki (eds.), the authors offer collections of meaningful accounts of making oral history through interviewing experiences in different places with different specialists in the field. According to this book, an oral historian tends to discuss ideas of topics and research questions before writing up something such as ‘how does our identity can form the stories that we hear? What are the difficulties that we bear when we listen? Can we admire our interviewees? How do we select about people or things we write about, and what may it cause

our academic scholarship? Above all, paradigms share the difficult experience of interviews and methodologies to overcome challenges while making oral history towards various cultural contexts (Sheftel & Zembrzycki, 2013). While doing an interview, it shows that how political and cultural changes shape the relationship between interviewees and interviewers and raises ethical questions towards what to write, what to ask, and what to publish determines the image of interviewees, the information we disclosed, and the history we write or create. Therefore, conducting an interview and selection of reliable interviewees' passes the valid sources of data, and it should be done as complete, accurate, trustworthy, and reliable and credible as a possible in-depth interview. The oral historians should follow few steps regarding interviews. The first step is getting permission from the interviewees for recording, transcript, letters, or any journals. And the second one is the interview location. Before sitting down for an interview, it is essential to choose a quiet and small room for better concentration and avoid outside noise or disturbance. Last but not least, come questionnaires - what to ask, determines the heart of the research and information that historians desire to write.

4.3.6 Validity and Reliability

The most common criticisms for oral history are its validity and reliability of the sources of data. As most of the data sources rely on the memories of the past questions arise on the 'accuracy of human memory' and its interpretation and reconstruction. Many oral historians agree that, like any other research source, oral history is reliable, and some time is not as often as there is a possibility that the informants could be untrustworthy and negatively influence the research subject and may have given wrong information. But there is no limitation to trust no single piece of data which should be trusted without any test or pieces of evidence. Having said this, according to Dunaway & Baum says reliability connection towards oral history is defined as the consistency with each individual who tells the same story over multiple times in different events and occasions. And validity refers to the degree of conformity between the reports of the activity and the event itself as recorded by other primary resources material such as documents, photographs, diaries, and letters (Dunaway & Baum, 1996, p. 89). In this connection, an oral history informer should be reliable and consistent with the reports and information with each other without significant contradiction. The goal of oral history researchers is to seek authentic representation by engaging them in an interview to obtain a valid source of data.

4.4 Chapter Summary

Doing oral history is not always studying just studying about people and culture but also valuing their stories and memories, which makes it more demanding emotionally to understand human lives truly. There is always a question about whether making oral history provides reliable facts of the past. Although oral history often plays an essential role in the writing of NBCC history and is an invaluable tool in preserving cultural and historical memory, its practice and use have been limited. At present, oral history in the service seldom reaches its full potential. Oral history efforts are often loosely structured, sporadic, and implemented in a piecemeal fashion. Projects are often launched in response to immediate needs, rather than as part of an overall objective or plan (McDonnell, 2013, pp.105-106)".

As I have already mentioned in the research methodology section that this research is going to be based on interviews and personal interaction, which technically falls under the oral history method and ideas that help to embrace and allow human-centered methodology and collections of past events and historical account of NBCC. The purpose of using oral history theory for this research is to empower the of Nepal Baptist Church members or each individual through the process of remembering past and reinterpreting the past to show the coming generation the 'past of truth.' As Schragger says "Talk about events is much more than data for the derivation of history: it is also a cultural production in its own right, a mode of communicating, a surfacing of meaningfulness that binds past and presents together (Schragger was quoted in Abrams, 2010, p. 7)". That means oral history itself produces meaningful evidential sources to represent the past and brings into lives in the present.

5 Chapter Five: The History of the Baptist Church

5.1 Introduction

There have always been speculations about the history of the Baptist churches. History shows that the Baptist churches have grown a lot since the year 1609 and are still in the process of developing. In the past, the Baptist churches have gone through the most persecution, not only from the outside but also from the other Christian denominations. During the year 1700, the Baptist churches were almost losing their zeal, but still, during the later years, they came up to be very strong and successful (Bhattraï, 2009, p. 5).

Even though the Baptist church is said to have been born in England, in reality, it started when the English believers traveled to Holland. Soon thereafter, the English Baptist church was started in England after its rise among English believers in Holland in the year 1612. Therefore, England thought to be the birthing ground for the Baptist churches. Over the centuries, the Baptist church spread to the United States of America due to English colonization. This chapter will explain how Baptist churches grew worldwide and how that led to the creation of NBCC as a part of the World Baptist Alliance partners.

5.2 Brief Baptist Church History of the World

The name ‘Baptist’ comes from the Baptist practice of immersion in water. The roots of the Baptist movement date back to the sixteenth century and the post-reformation period, although the first Baptist congregation appeared in 1609 in Holland. John Smyth¹⁷ was the key person to perform a radical and scandalous act of baptizing himself by pouring water on his head and his followers Thomas Helwys¹⁸. Both of them wanted to purify the Church of England of all the traces of Roman Catholicism. They joined a group called the “Separatists”¹⁹ in Gainsborough in 1606 (Rai, 2007, p.7). Eventually, Helwys and others returned to England in 1612 and established the First Baptist Church on English soil. During the same year, they found the General Baptist Church in London too.

The modern Baptist movement was born in the 16th century and is now a worldwide denomination with millions of believers worshipping in Baptist congregations. Here is a brief outline of the Baptist church history:

1612- The first Baptist church met in Spitalfields, London. Thomas Helwys was a

Founder of the Baptist denomination.

¹⁷ John Smyth, known as self-baptizer (immersion) by rejecting infant baptism. He was the founder of English Baptist organization in England by rejecting the liturgy of Anglican traditional hierarchy.

¹⁸ Thomas Helwys was one of the joint founders of the Baptist denomination who took immersion baptisms by John Symth. He inspired people to separate from the state church (known as separatists) with full religious freedom against the Anglican hierarchy.

¹⁹ Separatists was an independent baptist group in England during the 16th and 17th century. Their key affirmation was a congregational church established by the Holy Spirit, not any state or human authority. They promoted the right and individual religious freedom which is determined by its own self not by any state authority or higher power.

1689- The Act of Toleration passed, allowing freedom of worship in England.

1792- Baptist missionary society founded by William Carey. It is now known as As BMS World Mission

1813- The first Baptist Assembly was held in London.

1891- The General Baptists²⁰ and Particular Baptists²¹ came together to form the present Baptist Union of Great Britain.

1905- The Baptist World Alliance (BWA) was formed and held its first Baptist World Congress in London.

After the formation of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA), it began to network with the Baptist family to impact the world with a frequent confession of faith and commitment to Christ. Currently, the BWA brings together 239 member organizations in 125 countries, with 47 million members in 168,885 churches. The NBCC churches are also included in those numbers (BWA official web page, 2019). The alliance divided into six regional or geographical fellowships: North American Baptist Fellowship (NMBF), Asia Pacific Baptist Federation (APBF), All-Africa Baptist Fellowship, Caribbean Baptist Fellowship, Union of Baptists in Latin America, and European Baptist Federation. NBCC is a member of the APBF to BWA. It stands as a voluntary association that cooperates to promote unity among the Baptist churches worldwide. It does so without exercising sovereign authority over any member's body; instead, it gives them independent existence and sovereign administration, judicial decision-making, and legislative power.

²⁰General Baptists: this group came to be known as General Baptists because they believed in a "general" atonement. The General Baptists also had a distinct belief that Christians could face the possibility of "falling from grace". The two primary founders of the General Baptist movement were John Smyth and Thomas Helwys. The earliest General Baptist Church was thought to be founded about 1608 or 1609. Its chief founder was John Smyth (1570-1612) and it was located in Holland.

²¹Particular Baptists believe that Christ died for the elected person, .i.e., a particular group of people. This group was influenced by the great reformer John Calvin and held strongly to a "particular" atonement. The first church was thought to be founded around 1633 or 1638 in England.

5.3 Brief Baptist Church History of Nepal

The first Baptist movement in Nepal was through William Carry's translation of the Bible into the Nepali language in 1821 (only the New Testament). This translation helped spread the Baptist Mission in Calcutta, which also played a significant role in bringing the Gospel to Nepalese people who lived on the border of India and Nepal (Chamlagai, 2004, p.11). Most of the Baptist Missionaries worked in northeast India like Mizoram, Nagaland, Manipur, and Meghalaya because of the ban for foreigners to preach inside of Nepal. These missionaries, who worked in northeast India among the migrated Nepalese people, indirectly played a vital role in the early Baptist movement in Nepal.

United Mission made another essential contribution to Nepal (UMN), one of the first non-profit organizations that entered into Nepal in 1954 A.D. Among the foreign experts in UMN, a person called David Claud was the first one who started a house fellowship at Minbhawan, Kathmandu in 1979. Over that period, they went through lots of challenges and hard times due to the political situation of Nepal. It caused that fellowship to go semi-underground. The government was looking for an opportunity to arrest them for converting people into Christianity. Eventually, a young man called U.J. Gurung converted to Christianity, and as a result, that small house fellowship turned into the First Baptist Church in Nepal 1983. The first person to be the pastor was David Claud. He was the key person who started the Baptist Church in Nepal and along with Mac Sanglir, his assistant (U.J. Gurung, personal communication, 28 November 2019). At present, pastor U.J. Gurung is the pastor of this church, formerly called Ebenezer Baptist Church, but now called Kathmandu Baptist Church.

Later on, the Sharalung Baptist Church was established in Khotang in East Nepal by Pastor Ratna Bahadur Rai. It was followed by many young people who migrated from Nagaland, and North East India went to seek jobs and better opportunities. They came to the country with the Gospel and established Baptist churches in the different districts in Nepal. These churches were mostly under the umbrella of NCF.

5.4 Historical Background of the Nepal Baptist Church Council (NBCC)

5.4.1 Introduction

This section is the heart of the research project. It deals with the historical accounts of NBCC before and after its existence and development and follows with the significant accomplishments of its 25 years of establishments. I would like to inform all readers that this research was conducted by gathering and interpreting the voices and memories from NBCC pioneers, current and former admin staff, local church pastors, and lay members of a Baptist congregation in Nepal. Since there is no recorded or written history about NBCC, a significant portion of the research depended on interviews based on episodic memory theory. This refers to recalling specific events, incidents, and ceremonies, which lead to remembering things that happened in a particular place and certain people. Memory and the process of recalling the past are central to writing history. During the interviews, I allowed each respondent to share their story and experiences to reveal, assemble, and reflect on their sense of self without any pressures. I collected and gathered that information in chronological order to develop the history of NBCC, and interpreted the oral accounts into written text. In the meantime, I applied the discipline of narrative to obtain materials of NBCC experiences, stories, life, culture, and growth in the means of communication and created an orderly account in the following sections. Therefore, while giving voice to the disorder stories of NBCC, the oral theory discipline fit perfectly and played an essential role in preserving the cultural and historical memory of NBCC. During the entire research process and while narrating the oral communication with NBCC personnel, I have tried to present its validity and reliability as much as possible using available resources and interpretation. In a few cases, the narration of the history sounds more like personal testimony for readers instead of historical accounts due to the information that I have received and accessed by the responders.

5.4.2 Background

After the introduction of the *Panchayat*²² regime, the initial period was challenging for new churches. The local police frequently visited church leaders, and being summoned to police stations was a daily routine. Carrying a Bible, preaching, sharing testimony, and distributing tracts or any other Christian written materials were considered illegal activities. They often led to police investigations and arrests. In the outlying districts and villages, even a Christian gathering was treated as a crime. This period of persecution had the effect of promoting the growth of churches. Church followers found hope in the scriptures that said, “everything happens in His will and His time” (Ecc. 3:1). The leaders believed that God had a plan for the NBCC.

Presently, the Baptist denomination is in its third decade in Nepal. Among them, NBCC is one of the essential organizations that is playing a significant role as a leader among the Christian communities and in the non-Christian communities as well.

Nagaland, a state in northeastern India, has played an essential role in the story of NBCC. As the conversion of new Christians spread in Nagaland, it affected the migrated young Nepalese people. They were staying at Kohima, the capital of Nagaland, and surrounding villages nearby the Capital. One newly converted Nepalese who came to the Naga churches was late Prem Bahadur Chhetri. He lived in a leprosy colony in Kohima (Vero, 2012, p. 18).

The First Baptist Church was established in 1979 at Kohima with 18 Nepalese members who were mostly married to Naga women. Another Nepali Baptist Church was planted in Chumukedima in 1979 with Solon Karthak as the first Nepali Pastor, later followed by Hari Bahadur Gurung, and then Daniel Subba, as successors of Solomon Karthak. Both Hari Bahadur Gurung and Daniel Subba were the first pioneers who established the NBCC. As Nepali churches began to grow here and there in Nagaland, Nepali Christians in Nagaland came together to form their association to preserve unity and identity in the Lord. They also

²² Panchayat – known as a political system that runs without any parties for democracy in Nepal from 1960 to 1990. Under the King Mahendra instruction, the democratic government established by congress was thrown out of the parliament and he took power over it. He claimed to be sovereign power over the parliament and constitution. But he opens a way to choose democratic representative to help his administration but keeping power on his hand as a monarch.

developed a keen desire to go to Nepal to proclaim the word of God to their family, friends, relatives, and the whole nation.

Those were the three leading pioneers who brought the Gospel to Nepal and established the NBCC after their conversion in Nagaland. Their decision in itself was a great challenge. On the one hand, the critical political situation of Nepal and, on the other hand, the conservative thinking of the Nepalese society were major hindrances for bringing the Gospel into the country. Besides this, different church denominations already existed in Nepal and were not open to accepting the identity and practices of the Baptist faith. Neglecting all those threats and difficulties, the pioneers of NBCC came to Nepal and continued to preach the Gospel. Eventually, people started coming to the establishment of new Baptist churches.

During this time, the pioneers faced so much pressure by the Nepal government, other denominations, family, and society to stop sharing the Gospel. They never stopped, however, and they continued to preach and start new churches without noticing the persecution from their people. They believed God did not let their efforts go in vain. Because of their hard work and labor, the early Baptists established more churches scattered over the various districts of Nepal.

Eventually, the early Nepalese Baptists began to think and discuss issues like the unity, fellowship, co-operation, and exercise of Baptist beliefs in an organized way. They finally came together, with a historical achievement in the history of a Nepalese Baptist church, to establish the NBCC. The following chapter discusses the short biographies of the four pioneers of NBCC. They came together from different phases of their life, faith journeys, and various places in Nepal. These biographies help to dig deeper into the stories of NBCC and how it came into existence.

5.5 Conversion of Pioneers in Nagaland

5.5.1 Ratna Bahadur Rai

Ratna Bahadur Rai was born the youngest son of Mr. Dhanjuman Rai and Budhi Sobha Rai on 15th October 1889. He is from the Khotang District of Sagarmatha Zone in the eastern part of Nepal. Ratna is known as the founder and pastor of the First Baptist Church within the NBCC after arriving from northeast India. He belongs to an ethnic group called 'Rai.' He was

born into a low-income family. As a young man, he joined the British Army to support his family financially. After serving many years, he left the job and migrated to India (Muktan, 1998, p. 2).

Ratna Bahadur Rai was involved in gambling before he came to Christ. But when he went to Nagaland in 1965, he came to know about Christianity and transformed after becoming Christian and going to church. When he heard the good news about Christ through his neighbor Naga's friend, he repented and stopped gambling while he was in Nagaland. He grew more and more in Christ, and he trained himself in understanding the mysteries of the Bible. While in Nagaland, he joined a Baptist church, and after staying in Nagaland for 19 years, he decided to go back to his hometown in Nepal. During those days, Nepal followed a *Panchayat* system rather than a democratic one, so it was difficult for Ratna Bahadur Rai to preach the Gospel to his family, friends, and neighbors in his hometown, Khotang. At the same time, they did not accept him but instead rejected whatever he wanted to tell them about Christ (Muktan, 1998, pp. 22-24).

However, in January 1985, after he celebrated the first Christmas in his hometown, four people came forward from his village to accept Christ. That small group of people marked the beginning of the early Baptist Church in Nepal. Ratna did not give the official name for the fellowship because, during that time, there were few distinct denominations (Chamlagai, 2004, p. 27). The church followed the Baptist beliefs and practices in the faith, worship, doctrine, and administration patterns. As time passed by, his entire family, relatives, neighbors, kinsmen, and villagers came to Christ. Later through him and his influence, more than fifteen Baptist churches established in different districts in Nepal called Khotang, Bhojpur, Morang, and Sunsari (Chamlagai, 2004, p. 28). During his ministry life, he called for a meeting by a few Baptist friends from Itahari, where Daniel Subba and Hari Gurung had recently arrived from Nagaland. Later after a few meetings with Daniel Subba, Hari Gurung, and Samuel Rai, Ratna became one of the founder members of NBCC, who was the first man to start a Baptist church in Nepal. He pioneered the way for other Baptist churches in Nepal. More details of his contribution discussed in the following chapters that look at the historical development of NBCC.

5.5.2 Daniel Subba (Durga Parsad Limbu)

Daniel Subba is a founding president of NBCC. He belongs to another ethnic group called “Limbu,” which is under the same clan of Kirati. He was born in a place called Taplejung in eastern Nepal. During high school, he was attracted to Marxism because of its equality and concern for the poor. He was born and raised in a marginalized ethnic group who saw the injustices and discrimination between poor and rich. For Subba, Marxism seemed like an excellent alternative to bring justice and equality in the community. His concern was about how to bring justice for the poor and feed the hungry. It was this resentment and fear for justice that drove him to Marxism.

During that time, Nepal was an authoritarian society ruled by the king and imperial household. The communist party was outlawed, and anyone belonging to it goes to jail. Some of Subba’s tribal friends suggested to him that police were searching for him. Therefore, he escaped to Darjeeling, India, and eventually ended up in Imphal, Manipur, and northeast India (Lotz, 1999, pp, 20-22). At that time, he felt without hope and a future in a foreign country. He started gambling, drinking, and smoking to get peace in his heart to avoid the burning anger towards the situation back home. Eventually, his drinking habit and gambling got worse and made him unable to function as healthy as before. While he was going through these circumstances, he heard the good news of Christ through one of his Naga friends, Hoho Sikhu. Daniel Subba decided to become a Christian and accepted Christ as his personal savior.

In the following years, Daniel grew in faith, and God prepared him as a faithful servant in the Baptist Church in Manipur. He then baptized at the Kuki Baptist church on 15th January 1978 (Daniel Subba, personal communication, Dec 11, 2019). He worked as a church leader and evangelist in Manipur and Nagaland for many years. While working in Nagaland, he realized that God was calling him to work in Nepal, his native place. He shared this burning desire with his local church leaders in Manipur and Nagaland. Then the leaders of those churches agreed to send him to Nepal with their encouragement and financial and spiritual support.

In 1989, Subba moved to the eastern part of Nepal called Itahari as a missionary through the Nagaland Missionary Movement (NMM). There he started a small house fellowship with few people in Itahari (Vero, 2012, p. 19). Previously, Subba had been uncomfortable in other churches because of their different services, administration systems, and ways of worship.

When he came to Itahari, he started a church following his approach and style. After the year of 1991, his church was called the Itahari Baptist Church.

In 1992, Subba took the initiative to call a meeting of all the Baptist leaders since only a few scattered Baptist churches started, and they were leading their church independently. After the effort was called, churches accepted his call to come into the common umbrella to work together as a unified organization with the same vision and mission. As a result of the help of other church leaders, Subba and friends officially announced the Nepal Baptist Church Council (NBCC). Subba becomes the first president of NBCC, NBBC, MCDS, and the Mission director during the beginning phase.

Daniel Subba is a dynamic preacher who possessed excellent leadership ability. Worship and serving the community was his mission in life. Subba expressed a powerful message about what it means to be Baptist and strictly followed the Baptist denomination doctrinal beliefs. His contribution and leadership abilities helped lay the foundation of the NBCC and its growth in the land of Himalaya. For him, bringing Baptist churches under one umbrella was vital because it united people who practiced similar beliefs and shared the same doctrinal agenda. As a result, NBCC came into existence and followed by the Nepal Baptist Bible College, Multipurpose Community Development Service, and Mission department. In the history of NBCC, Subba remains a strong proponent of Baptist institution and doctrinal understanding among the Baptist church leaders and is a key leader behind the NBCC (Lotz, 1999, p. 2).

5.5.3 Hari Bahadur Gurung

Hari Bahadur Gurung comes from one of the ethnic groups in Nepal called Gurung. He is from Syangja district in western Nepal. He was a Buddhist before his conversion to Christianity. At a very young age, his father had moved to Kohima, Nagaland, to work at a store. Gurung was influenced by the Christian people around him who talked to him about Christianity. His friends gave him a Bible, and he began to read it. One day, Gurung had a vision of Christ (Lotz, 1999, p. 2).

Eventually, Gurung decided to accept Christ on 20th November 1978 in Kohima and was baptized by Rev. Deo Vihienuo. From 1980 to 1985, he preached the Gospel among the Nepalese in Nagaland (Hari Gurung, personal communication, 16 December 2019). In 1983,

he was appointed as the full-time pastor in the Nepali Baptist Church, which was established in 1976 at Kohima with 18 Nepali-speaking members (Vero, 2012, p. 18).

Since his conversion and early Christian experience was in a Baptist church amongst the Nagas,²³ he developed a strong desire to continue ministry with Nepali people. Therefore, in 1985, he returned to Nepal to preach among his people, family, and friends with the help of Nagaland's tribal Baptist church. In the beginning stage from 1985 to 1990, he assisted the Bagbazzar church in Pokhara, western Nepal, with Pastor Hari Thapa. This church was affiliated with the Nepal Christian Fellowship (NCF) (Hari Gurung, personal communication, 16 December 2019). Eventually, Gurung grew dissatisfied with their doctrinal faith, worship practices, and church administration. Finally, with the help of Samuel Rai in 1991, he started a Baptist church in Pokhara in western Nepal.

A few years back, Gurung and Daniel Subba got to know each other and found out that both ministers share the same faith. Quickly after knowing each other, Gurung agreed with Subba to start the NBCC and collaborate. As a result, Hari was the first found secretary of NBCC. Gurung and the other founding leaders of the NBCC faced harsh criticism, persecution, and rejection from other denominational church leaders and non-Christian society.

5.5.4 Samuel Rai

Samuel Rai was another vital contributor to the establishment of NBCC. Samuel Rai was 38 when he was contacted by Daniel Subba and Hari Gurung to talk about starting NBCC. At that moment, he had just arrived from studying abroad at Spurgeon's College in London, United Kingdom. Rai worked as a co-coordinator and board member of the NBCC since its establishment. He was the only board member who graduated and had overseas education, which helped NBCC to function orderly.

During his college time, Samuel Rai was involved in the communist movement and sincerely supported the communist ideology. He was persecuted, beaten, and ostracized by the local

²³ Nagas are indigenous inhabitants who live in the region of northeast India to northwestern Burma. They are divided into about 27 different tribes with distinct languages and who live in mountains and valleys. They were known as furious tribes and headhunters until the British colonization in India. The conversion of Naga people took place around the 18th century through American Baptist missionaries. During that time, Naga's living separated from modern society and technology. Since then, about 90% out of the total population converted into Christianity.

government of Nepal for supporting the communist revolution at that time. He was attracted to the communist ideology because he objected to the caste system and religious worship that he saw in Hinduism and Buddhism. He was inspired by Marxism, Leninism, and Maoism's teachings about equality in society. He served not only as a university student leader but as a regional leader for the Nepal student union from 1981. The union had 24,000 communist students in eastern Nepal. During his service with the NBCC, Due to the armed conflict, he was arrested by police and injured by gunshot and a knife during the fight (Samuel Rai, personal communication, 22 December 2019).

After four years of this struggle as a communist, he was mentally and emotionally struggling and genuinely lost the peace in his mind. Towards the end of 1982, a few trusted friends him to the communist leaders. It made him an enemy among his friends and the government side as well. In the meantime, one of his friends from the Baptist church named Tek Bahadur spoke to him about the dead-end that is political involvement. He convinced Samuel Rai to walk away from the communist revolutionary movement and never turned back again. Samuel Rai became an ambassador for Christ and a senior pastor of the Baptist church in Pokhara. He continues to run a few Bible schools, mission and evangelism projects, social entrepreneurship programs, and travel and tourism businesses. Samuel is very bright and has worked with the other Christian groups of Nepal. He knows better than other Baptists about the western Baptist groups (Lotz, 1999, p. 3).

In addition to the early Baptists like Ratna, Daniel, Hari, and Samuel, others in the church contributed to the creation and expansion of the NBCC as well. The following sections will explain the few fundamental churches that invested their prayers, finance, resources, and time to start churches where people can meet, share, and unite the Baptist community. Among many, three crucial churches played a vital role in the initial period.

5.6 Key Local Churches That Played a Major Role

5.6.1 Saralung Baptist Church

The Saralung Baptist church was the first Baptist church in Nepal after the arrival of Assembly of God (AG) in the Nepali Christian community. The name Saralung is the name of the city in Khotang, a district of eastern Nepal. The founder established the church in 1981 when the persecution of Christians and churches was harsh and rampant throughout the

country. Despite the challenges, the Rev. Ratna Bahadur Rai started this church before the existence of NBCC, and it played a significant role in starting the NBCC as a mission organization (Rongong, 2012, pp. 96-97).

The initial period of the church was challenging. Firstly, during those days, Nepal was not under a democratic system but rather a Panchayati system. It made it difficult for them to preach the Gospel. Secondly, at that time, there were no church denominations nor an understanding of separate denominations by leaders. All the churches were under an umbrella association called the Nepal Christian Fellowship (NCF). Because Christian leaders did not understand the different denominations, they thought Baptist churches were new and separate from the NCF, even heretics or a cult. (Muktan, 1998, p. 25). Later, the NCF rejected the Baptist churches and their teachings, which affected their recognition as a church in Nepal. It led to Baptist church leaders coming together to share and practice the faith and beliefs that they practiced in Nagaland. Therefore, Saralung Baptist church played a vital role as a place for Baptists to practice their religion. NCF excluded the Saralung Baptist Church.

5.6.2 Itahari Baptist Church

Itahari Baptist Church (IBC) is another crucial church that played a significant role in starting the NBCC. This church was founded by Daniel Subba in 1980 after his conversion in northeast India and decided to come back to serve his people. After arriving in the country, Baptist leader rejected by the NCF and local church leaders accused them of being a cult and heretics. It hurt Rev. Daniel Subba very profoundly. He decided to appeal to all the Baptist church leaders with the help of church members around the country, even though there were very few churches named Baptist due to persecution. Eventually, he was able to communicate with them and officially called the first meeting at Subba's home before the existence of NBCC. It was a milestone for the arrival of the Baptist mission in Nepal and also for the beginning of NBCC (Daniel Subba, personal communication, 11 December 2019).

The significant contribution by the Itahari Baptist church was to take the initiative to bring together Baptist leaders under the one roof to respond to the institutions that accused them of being a cult. Secondly, Itahari Baptist church generously opened its place and provided food for multiple long meetings over the years. Thirdly, Itahari Baptist church strengthened the mission, vision, and goals of the Baptists churches in Nepal through financial and spiritual

contributions. As a result, after the two years of the tremendous contribution of Itahari Baptist church and leaders, NBCC came into existence and overcame the judgments from other Christian leaders in the NCF. Because the Itahari Baptist church stood firm and defended itself, it was possible to overcome the challenges and discrimination. It was an excellent example of the other Baptist churches at that time. Since the establishment of NBCC, most of the leading people were born and belonged to the IBC and contributed tremendously to its growth and success.

5.7 The Beginning of NBCC

Compared to now, it was not easy for the Christians who started Baptist churches in Nepal in 1993. Churches banned from preaching publicly. They had to face frequent persecution and threatened by their family, neighbors, friends, society, and the government. Despite these challenges, Baptist Pastors and leaders were coming from northeast India and other countries and fought continuously to establish churches. They risked their life and had to face various stigmas and challenges to keep exercising their faith within Nepal's diversely religious society. After the 1951 democratic revolution, the Government allowed freedom for spiritual practices, which helped Nepal to be a fertile and fruitful place to exercise the Christian faith as well. Because of the freedom of religious practices written in the constitution after 1951, the number of Christians increased rapidly, and all the underground churches started to disclose themselves. It encouraged other churches to come together and work together. This spirit of encouragement also affected Baptist churches, among other denominations. The members of the growing Baptist church felt the need to come together to work as a team in unity, led towards the development of the Nepal Baptist Church Council (NBCC).

The following chapter will explain the chronological growth and important events that helped NBCC come into existence and develop over the next 26 years.

5.7.1 First Joint Meeting

After several years of hard work and prayers, on Saturday, 11th April 1993, Rev. Daniel Subba, a pastor of Itahari Baptist Church, held the first joint meeting of Baptist churches in his living room. Eight different pastors and leaders who were involved in different parts of Nepal attended the meeting. Even though a few leaders were unable to participate, they gave their full support and verbal agreement. This very first joint meeting became a historic day for

all the Baptist believers in Nepal in terms of finding common ground for practicing their faith. On that day, they decided to form the Nepal Baptist Church Fellowship (NBCF) (Daniel Subba, personal communication, 11 December 2019). NBCF became the first formal typical umbrella organization for all the Baptist churches to come together as a family and express their own identity without barriers from outsiders. Listed are the people who attended that first historic meeting and the board members who selected after the sessions. See Appendix no— one for a list of attendees.

That first meeting involved considerable discussion and prayers. Finally, they formed the board committee to execute and enhance the work for the betterment of Baptist churches and mission work in the country. However, they selected a nine-member executive committee with members. See Appendix no—two for a list of the first board members.

5.7.2 First General Meeting in Chitwan

A year after the formation of board members, the first general meeting was held in Bharatpur Baptist Church, Chitwan, central Nepal, on the 3rd of December 1993. The first step taken by the general assembly was to change the name of Nepal Baptist Churches Fellowship (NBCF) to Nepal Baptist Church Council (NBCC) (Subba, 2008, p. 3). This general meeting also came up with the organization's mission, vision, goal, and strategic plan. They hoped to further their mutual work, not just with oral agreements, but with proper written documentation. The process of documenting the NBCC's vision, mission, and goals encouraged the executive board and lay members to work together to achieve the ultimate goal. As a result, more churches and fellowship groups joined the NBCC in the few months after the meetings. The addition of more numbers helped add more human resources to mobilize even more people (Subba, 2008, p. 4).

In the meantime, during this one year of period, NBCF was charged by the government for public evangelism, and Rev. Daniel Subba was arrested by police and put into jail for many days. They accused him of converting people into Christianity. It was the most stressful and challenging time for all of the NBCF. With the support of BWA and pressure from all Baptist churches across the country, Subba was released from jail. However, his court case continued for many years.

Despite all these difficult times, NBCC never stopped growing in size and numbers. It also began building international relationships within the early period after its establishment. Let's look at the first steps of the beginning of international relations.

5.7.3 Beginning of International Relationship

On 10-12 November 1993, the NBCC participated in the conference called “Mission and Evangelism Conference” by the Asia Baptist Federation (APBF) and Baptist World Alliance (BWA) at Kolkata, West Bengal, India. The conference was organized to celebrate the 200 years of the great Baptist Missionary William Carry, who arrived in India from England on 17th August 1761. That historical celebration opened the new road for NBCC, not only to represent the Nepalese Baptist church but also to help establish a new relationship with international partners (Daniel Subba, personal communication, 11 December 2019). To participate in the conference itself was a great achievement and gave strong encouragement to its members to pursue the missions they had been doing by themselves. On behalf of NBCC, Rev. Daniel Subba (president), Ps. Hari Bahadur Gurung (General Secretary), and Samuel Rai (Coordinator) attended the conference. Rev. Subba remembers that event in this way:

“Two other friends (Hari and Samuel) and I were so happy to get invited and had an opportunity to attend the “Mission and Evangelism Conference” on behalf of NBCC. Praise be to God. It was the very first international conference as the three of us went to Kolkata, representing entire Baptist churches with the hope that we would be able to share our struggles and challenges on the international platform. So that we will be able to address these issues and move ahead with their supporting hands not only through prayers but with organizational development and financial support. The meeting went as we expected, and we returned home with the assurance of help and support from international communities, which gave more confidence to work harder for our people (Daniel Subba, personal communication, 11 December 2019).”

During this conference, NBCC leaders were able to have a meeting with the Asian Baptist Federation (ABF) and the Baptist World Alliance (BWA) leaders. They invited the ABF and BWA leaders to visit Nepal and get to know more about the work of NBCC. Not later than

two months, Dr. Denton Lotz,²⁴ the General Secretary of BWA, and Edwin Lopez, on behalf of the Asian Pacific Baptist Federation (APBF), made an official visit to the NBCC. Accompanying them were Rev. Tony Cupit, Bony Resu, and Jack Patnayak (Lotz, 1994, p. 20). Dr. Lotz remembers this visit on his official reports regarding NBCC's first approaches.

“In 1992, the BWA received a letter from Rev. Hari Bahadur Gurung, General Secretary of the Nepal Baptist Church Fellowship, requesting information as to how to become a member of the Baptist Church Alliance. We were surprised to receive a letter from Nepal and to learn that there was a fellowship of Baptist churches in Nepal. We had always thought that the United Mission to Nepal and the Nepal Christian (NCF) were the only allowed groups (Lotz, 1994, pp, 20-23).”

During this official visit of the BWA and APBF, NBCC leaders expressed the desire to become a member of the BWA and a cooperative partner for mission work in Nepal. The NBCC leaders insisted that, for doctrinal reasons, they are determined to be Baptists and did not wish to join the United Church. Their conversion experience was through northeast Indian Baptists. It is where they learned their Baptist principles, and this is why they wanted to become Baptists. Dr. Lotz described his first visit to Nepal in this way:

“It is difficult to express in words the amazing joyful experiences to worship, pray, sing, and preach with our Nepalese Baptist brothers and sisters. They are poor, and many of the churches cannot pay for their pastors. They must go to their people and say I need rice and I need vegetables. And in this way they survive with less than \$50 a month as the average worker's salary, which includes children to educate, supplying food and cloth, etc. They need at least about \$100 a month to take care of the family and survive (Lotz, 1994, p. 23).”

On the same visit of BWA and APBF, on 6 January 1994, BWA Secretary Dr. Denton inaugurated the NBCC office in Pokhara (Daniel Subba, personal communication, 11 December 2019). This partnership was the beginning of NBCC's history as a Baptist

²⁴Dr. Denton Lotz was a secretary of BWA during the time when NBCC was trying to form an organization and have a membership with BWA. During that time, he was one of the important people who played a role in the establishment of NBCC and its growth while preserving its indigenous identity in spite of opposition from leaders in northeast India.

denominational organization in Nepal. It also gave them access to international agencies. It was not just a partnership with BWA, but rather a friendship that encouraged all the NBCC pioneers. It inspired them to expand their mission work all over the country and plant churches under the supervision of BWA.

Around the same time, there were Baptist missionaries who sent to work with the United Mission to Nepal (UMN) in the non-profit sector. C. There is no evidence left of their engagement on behalf of NBCC for promoting the Baptist faith. Also, there was no other foreign mission that claimed to be a founder of the NBCC. Therefore, the NBCC claimed to be the original indigenous group of Baptists. They discussed these issues regarding the Chennai Mission Consultation, which explained in the following chapter sections.

5.7.4 Participation in Chennai Mission Consultation

On 16-19 January 1994, the NBCC was invited for a Mission Consultation hosted by BWA and APBF in Chennai (Madras). On behalf of NBCC, Rev. Daniel Subba (President) and Hari Gurung (Secretary) attended and presented on the current need for infrastructure, technical, economic, and human resources for NBCC and their current and upcoming plans. Then, NBCC was going through a hard time to figure out the organizational structure, financial resources, and partnership with technical advisors. This meeting helped them to seek help on an international platform.

In the same meeting, when Hari Gurung and Daniel Subba were about to finish their presentation, the leaders from northeast India opposed the idea of the “indigenous identity”²⁵ of NBCC, which remained a hot topic the duration of the meeting. During the presentation, NBCC introduced itself as an indigenous organization since native people in the native region started it without any foreign involvement. It offended the leaders from Nagaland. They raised their voice against including the NBCC as an indigenous group (Hari Gurung, personal communication, 22 December 2019). NBCC founding President Daniel Subba remembers that incident like this:

²⁵ Indigenous identity defines that NBCC was established by native Nepalese people not by any foreign missionaries or mission organization. Therefore, they would like to call them a purely indigenous organization with the identity influenced by local culture and traditions.

“We were discouraged as we were talking about the mission and further plans during the meeting. Northeast leaders were offended by the important issues that we raised in the meetings and strongly opposed the subjects NBCC brought to discussed on the international forum. The entire representatives from NBCC couldn’t sleep the whole two nights, and it was a very intense and stressful meeting. As a sign of disappointment, NBCC boycotted the one-day meeting of the conference, which led to seeking the attention of BWA and APBF. Overall, I remembered this meeting was fruitful in a way that NBCC got a lot of attention from outsiders. Still, at the same time, we were disappointed with neighboring leaders who didn’t support the core values of NBCC and misunderstanding our culture even though they were living very close (Daniel Subba, personal communication, 11 December 2019).”

After the one-day boycott of the meeting, leaders of APBF and BWA agreed to join the discussion with NBCC and northeast leaders. The debate, however, did not end positively but instead became more complicated even though different mediators helped to de-escalate the tension. During this intense and stressful situation, Pastor of Hauda Baptist Church and the Vice-Chairperson of Asia Baptist Federation Rev. Jac Patanayk and General Secretary of Bangladesh Baptist Organization Rev. Jensun Das played the vital role of mediator.

Overall, this mission conference introduced NBCC to other Baptist churches from around the globe and added them to the NBCC and its work in a close way. It was a milestone for international partnership and for becoming an official member of the BWA and other Baptist Mission agencies from the west.

5.7.5 Cooperation of International Baptist Mission and Partnership with the BWA

During the visit of BWA and APBF leaders in Nepal, an action committee was formed and called Nepal Baptist Joint Action Committee (NBjac)²⁶ on 7 January 1994. The purpose of this committee was to continue the missions of service and evangelism by NBCC across

²⁶ NBjac committee was responsible for staying in contact with the international community. Samuel Rai was the first NBjac coordinator and representative on behalf of NBCC. This committee was responsible for maintaining a smooth relationship with international partners and leaders. It was active until 1997 and later dissolved.

Nepal (Lotz, 1994, p. 22). The primary responsibility of this action committee was to continue the independence of the council, preserving unity, and expand mission work. This committee worked successfully until 1997 to help grow NBCC missions in the field, like planting more churches and supporting local pastors with training, finances, resources, and infrastructure needs.

As part of the initiative of NBJAC, they held the “Nepal Baptist Partners Consultation” in November 1998 in Biratnagar, East Nepal. It was the first and last conference organized by NBJAC. During that consultation, the primary attendees were from the Chinese Baptist Convention and other western mission partners from different countries. They participated in helping NBCC and discussing their current on-going needs and further plans. This consultation opened the new way for NBCC to expand its partnerships and the growth of churches across the country. Unfortunately, after the meeting, NBJAC was dissolved due to the conflict among NBCC leaders, especially between coordinator Samuel Rai, Daniel Subba, and Hari Gurung (Bhattarai, n.d., pg.13-14). Since then, Mr. Samuel Rai is no longer associated with NBCC. This internal conflict of NBCC discussed in the following chapters.

5.7.6 Second General Assembly in Pokhara

Despite multiple internal and external challenges, NBCC organized a three-days conference and general meetings in Dipendra City Hall in Kaski, Pokhara, from the 27th to 29th September 1994. It was the second-biggest international Baptist gathering with about 800 participants who were pastors, leaders, and lay members of Baptist churches in Nepal, Europe, America, Africa, and neighboring countries. This meeting was the most prominent historical gathering for Nepalese Baptist churches, showing that they had a strong sense of unity. At the meeting were BWA president Vampal Man, BWA General Secretary Dr. Denton Lotz, APBF leaders Edwin Lopez and Bony Resu, Baptist leaders from Europe, and leaders of different NGOs and organizations in Asia and northeast India.

The most significant achievement of this second NBCC General Assembly was that so many international guests came to hear Nepalese leaders share their stories, achievements, and further plans. This vast global presence encouraged pastors and lay members to keep working as they had been doing in the past. During the assembly, international Baptist communities strengthened their partnerships. They showed their support of Nepalese Baptist leaders and

encouraged them to persevere despite persecution, discrimination, or any other challenges from both society and government.

5.7.7 The Crystal Hotel Meeting: From Struggle to Achievement

During the second General Assembly, the NBCC, BWA, APBF, and Northeast India leaders met at the Crystal Hotel in Pokhara. They met for five hours to address the controversial topic of the “indigenous identity” of NBCC. President Daniel Subba remembers that meeting like this:

“It was a very tough and stressful long meeting with international partners. For Nepalese leaders, it was challenging to communicate due to a lack of English language skills to deliver the message accurately. However, without any hesitation and shame, I took this as an opportunity and presented NBCC’s mission, vision, goals, and plans and clarified why NBCC is an indigenous organization by using my broken English, Hindi, and Nagamish languages (Daniel Subba, personal communication, 11 December 2019)”.

At the meeting, the validity of NBCC's claim of indigenous identity brought up again and highly debated. NBCC leaders declared that NBCC not founded by any mission agencies or missionaries from a foreign country. Or was it directed by any other organization’s policies? Instead, it was established and nurtured by the effort of migrated Nepalese young people. The NBCC set up its service manual and contextualized their faith and way of worship in Nepali language, songs and music, dress, and food. The culture and traditions not copied from foreign Baptist organization guidebooks. Therefore, NBCC claimed to be an indigenous Baptist community in Nepal. The northeast Indian leaders objected. Daniel Subba guesses that the northeastern Indian leaders wanted to keep their influence and presence in Nepal because most of the founding members of NBCC converted in northeast India (Daniel Subba, personal communication, 11 December 2019).

Finally, after the long and very intense debate, NBCC leaders successfully established themselves as an independent, indigenous Baptist organization in Nepal. It was a first in Baptist denominations, both in Nepal and in international Baptist communities (Bhattraï, n.d, p. 14). At the end of the meeting, leaders from northeast India realized their mistake and accepted NBCC's desire to be Baptist but not neglect their own cultural identity.

In the months after the meeting, the internal conflict took place among Baptist leaders. Rev. Rai decided to leave NBCC and has never re-joined to this day. The following chapter explains the causes of conflict based on interviews with both parties

5.7.8 Conflict among NBCC leaders and separation of Rai

During the interviews, it was very tough to synchronize the information from interviewees due to some very personal matters which seems not appropriate to write down or record. However, a few issues can explain the cause of the conflict over the period.

The conflict divided into two groups: on one side, the whole executive body under the leadership of President Subba and Secretary Gurung, and the other hand, Rev. Samuel Rai. During the interviews, both parties explained their perspectives about the conflict and the reasons for the conflict—some information omitted due to its sensitive nature and the request by interviewees to keep it confidential by following ethical research guidelines mentioned in chapter two and respecting the past and the existing relationship of interviewees.

According to President Subba and Secretary Gurung, they agreed that Rev. Rai was neither faithful nor accountable in his involvement with NBCC. They especially pointed to when Rev. Rai led the NBJAC conference. Subba and Hari said Mr. Rai didn't consult with the Executive Board regarding the conference, venue, guests, finances, and other programs of the NBCC (Subba and Hari, personal communication, 22 December 2019).

On the other hand, Rev. Rai disagreed with the perspective of Subba and Hari. He said that both President Subba and Hari plotted against him and convinced the other board members to expel him from NBJAC and NBCC. Furthermore, he says the reason was that both Subba and Hari were jealous of him having an international degree. Rev. Rai was recently backed from England with his bachelor's degree. He said he was influential in education, communication, and intellectualism, which made them fear that he would take over the organization. According to Rev. Rai, both of them blamed him as being arrogant and not responsible for his job. It led to NBCC firing Rev. Rai (Samuel Rai, personal communication, 22 December 2019).

Noticeably, the lack of proper communication about each person's roles and responsibilities and misunderstanding of the organization caused the conflict. Both parties did not seek the

help of a mediator for reconciliation. Instead, the NBCC fired Rev. Rai from the organization. It seems unfair to him. If this conflict did not happen, NBCC might have grown more substantial and more in numbers.

5.8 Radical Growth of NBCC after the Arrival of Democracy

After the conflict, NBCC remained a partner of BWA, ABPF, and other foreign Baptist churches. It continued to prosper and grow in terms of numbers and planting new churches all over Nepal. In the meantime, the establishment of democracy in the country also helped open ways for freely practicing religions apart from Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam. It helped the NBCC and other mission organizations to grow within a short time.

The following chapters examine the strategic work of NBCC and how it led to the Baptist denomination growing in Nepal. Some crucial goals and events aided in its growth.

5.8.1 Gospel Outreach Movement (Susamachar Dawa)

One of the most successful events organized by the NBCC was called the “Gospel Outreach Movement” (Susamachar Dawa). It took place in 1998 throughout the country, from the eastern Mechi region to the western Mahakali region. It covered 14 zones and 75 districts. This movement was the first and most fruitful for NBCC because it brought about the radical growth and conversion of people wherever the outreach group went (Subba, 1998, p. 1). The outreach movement officially started from the 1st week of March in 1998 to the 1st week of November 1999. It was an eight-month-long outreach with volunteers going from door to door, into valleys, and up hills. They covered almost 50 percent of Nepal’s area, including the *Terai* and mountains. The outreach teams formed according to their location and native places. The target goal of the outreach movement was to reach 10,000,000 people and share the Gospel with them. Additionally, they wanted to plant at least 300 churches and mission points in different locations. This movement was also known as “The harvesting years” (Subba, 1998, p. 2).

Within these two years of outreach, NBCC was able to conduct more than 500 big and small crusades and preach the Gospel in different places and among ethnically diverse communities. To run this “Gospel Outreach Movement” effectively, the management team selected 30 crusade organizers from different districts and zones, church leaders, church choirs,

musicians, and preachers who were under the leadership of NBCC mission departments (Daniel Subba, personal communication, 11 December 2019). They did door to door preaching and distributed tracks, pamphlets, and booklets in the Nepali language to share information about the Christian faith. As a result, hundreds of people from different castes came to know about and convert to Christianity.

At the same time, the outreach teams faced tremendous challenges, including violent opposition. While sharing and preaching, the groups were beaten by local leaders, religious leaders, and local authorities. Sometimes, the teams were not allowed to enter villages. In some cases, groups were arrested by police and imprisoned for many days and criticized for accepting a foreign religion, a “religion of white people,” and a “cow eater” culture, which is an insult in Nepali culture. Despite all this opposition, the outreach teams did not stop preaching, sharing the Gospel, and going door-to-door to meet people. Their commitment brought many people into their Christian community or the Kingdom of God.

5.8.2 Establishment of Cell Churches and Fellowship

After the Gospel Outreach movement, the second strategy taken by NBCC was to follow up with all the different cell groups and churches. They started among the areas where outreach teams preached the Gospel. They focused on Nepal’s eastern region, where one-third of the churches established, followed by the central and Midwest regions.

Founding President Daniel Subba said that the initial growth of the church was radical and unexpected. With a massive number of people coming to the NBCC churches, it was challenging to manage the new people. Therefore, NBCC decided to open a new office in each region to look after new church members and cell groups (Daniel Subba, personal communication, 12 December 2019).

Meanwhile, the NBCC leader realized that mission and evangelism was the key to bringing more people to Christ. They saw the fear of being rejected by the Hindu-dominant society was not stopping hundreds of poor, Dalit (lower caste people), and other marginalized people from coming to church and converting to Christianity. Though Christianity was very new to the Nepali context, and people had little understanding of Christians, many people were affected and started practicing an utterly new faith and way of life. They learned the Baptists' songs,

worship style, and instruments, changed their eating habits, and started praying and reading the Bible.

As NBCC leaders saw new people join their church, they encouraged them to share their faith and bring more people to the churches. Church members started sharing the Gospel with friends, family, relatives, and neighbors with boldness. That evangelism led Baptist churches to work together, and the NBCC organization grew more prominent and better. The following chapters will present the different departments and bodies of NBCC, how they function, and the roles and responsibilities.

5.9 Departments: The Foundation of NBCC

As NBCC churches grew, it was increasingly challenging to manage them, to teach the new members, to support them financially, and to appoint new leaders. Therefore, after seven years since its establishment, NBCC announced the three regional departments on the 25th of April 2003 at Itahari Sunsari (NBCC News Letters, 2007, p. 4). The following chapters describe more about these different departments of NBCC.

5.9.1 Regional Associations

NBCC needs to address the growing numbers of churches, and the council decided to extend the offices in the base of regions so that it would be easy to stay connected with new local churches and leaders. The regional association comprised three geographical areas of the beginning phase: the western, eastern, and central. These regions were renamed based on new geographical divisions after the Federal Democratic Republic constitution launched in 2015. Now, these regional offices are known as:

- a) Province 1 Baptist Church Association
- b) Province 2 and 3 Baptist Church Association
- c) Province 4 and 5 Baptist Church Association
- d) Province 6 and 7 Baptist Church Association

(Note: Provinces mentioned above offices applies to NBYF, NBWF, NBCF in the same manner)

The existence of NBCC would have been impossible without its regional networks of local churches and active participants. Therefore, NBCC General Congress approved the agenda to start a regional association in 2003 at Bharatpur, Chitawan. It officially launched on 25th April 2003 at Itahari Baptist Church (NBCC News Letters, 2007, pg. 4).

NBCC developed an administrative manual to run the regional association and other departments under its supervision. For the regional association, the representative of the Executive Board was elected democratically from the local churches and mission points (small fellowships). The Executive Committee contained 11 members in total, and among them, only the secretary was a full time paid staff. The rest of them contributed as volunteers and received only daily allowances in specific meetings and traveling jobs related to organization work.

The primary purpose of establishing a regional association was to look after and mobilize the local churches who registered with NBCC. It also served to develop effective and faster communication, conduct seminars and pieces of training, and, most importantly, facilitate the expansion of churches and their mission and evangelism work in their respective regions. In order to build the strength of churches, the Executive Committee organized seminars and workshops for leadership development, spiritual growth, financial stability, evangelism, and social engagement of churches in each region. Also, the regional associations shared the voice of local leaders, their stories, challenges, achievements, and plans, which was reported by the secretary to the NBCC headquarters office. (Ratna Rai, personal communication, 23 December 2019).

5.9.2 Nepal Baptist Youth Fellowship (NBYF)

Because of the development of a robust Baptist youth presence in the churches, NBCC created the Nepal Baptist Youth Fellowship (NBYF) on 26th October 1995 at Letang Baptist Church, Morang District. In the initial phase, NBYF was formed to lead all the local church's youth; however, it was not possible to manage every Baptist church's young people. Therefore, NBCC launched a regional fellowship in the same structure as the regional council in 2003. NBYF leads the regional fellowship under the supervision of NBCC. Currently, NBYF divided into four provinces according to the new geographical divisions of the Nepal

Government, as in the same manner as the regional associations mentioned above under the regional association's section.

To this day, the Nepal Baptist Youth Fellowship (NBYP) still aims to be “leading the leaders to transform the lives of young people.” It specifically seeks to empower local Baptist youth, mobilize them, and develop the next leaders for the organization (Prem Bhattarai, personal communication, 27 December 2019). Currently, NBYP is serving with a partnership of 102 Baptist churches and 252 cell churches across the country. There are approximately 8,000 active youth members who are directly associated with NBYP and working on its behalf for the betterment of the youth community. Its primary focuses are networking, leadership, discipleship, music, sports, and team building by finding resources.

The first president of NBYP was Mr. Gajendra Tamang, from Shantinagar Baptist church, and the secretary was Arjun Gurung. Both were elected from the first congress in 1995. After a year of service, there was a second congress held in Shantinagar Baptist Church in 1996. At this congress, Ratna Bahadur Rai selected for president and Jirman Rai for secretary of the Youth Department. This annual election process continued at first. In recent years, however, the NBYP elects a new president and secretary every three years by a vote of regional church youth. The NBYP is primarily run by volunteers, except for the secretary, who holds a full-time position. Today, the most recent president of NBCC is Mr. Ratna Bahadur Rai; He was the second president of NBYP in 1996.

5.9.3 Nepal Baptist Women Fellowship (NBWF)

By seeing the growth of NBYP, NBCC realized to do the same with women’s groups. NBCC started a second department on 2nd February 1995 called Nepal Baptist Women Fellowship (NBWF) to mobilize the women in Baptist churches. In the initial period, NBWF divided in the same manner as the NBYP and regional associations into three regions: east, west, and central regions.

NBWF has approximately 8,000 or more members in local churches. It has been training laywomen and vulnerable women, not just in spiritual aspects, but also in skills such as tailoring, stitching, and other income-generating trades. In this way, they help support the families and the churches.

The NBWF also played a vital role in developing and increasing the involvement of women in preaching and evangelism in local Baptist churches (Shanti Rai, personal communication, 28 December 2019). Since NBWF is working nation-wide, they have been able to encourage, prepare, and establish the NBWF in different regions and support the women spiritually, mentally, and socially. NBWF became a platform for marginalized women to practice their leadership abilities and explore their inner talents.

5.9.4 Mission and Evangelism (M&E)

The heart of NBCC lies in its Mission and Evangelism (M&E) department. The work of the ME has been a cornerstone of NBCC's growth and development in the past 25 years. The ME department was officially started in 1996 under the supervision of the NBCC. The department supports NBCC-affiliated churches to carry out specific mission and evangelism work across the country. Currently, the ME works with 236 churches and 239 cell groups consisting of over 20000 baptized believers with youth, women, and children (Mohan Chamlagai, personal communication, 27 December 2019). Two hundred fifteen ordained senior and assistant pastors are working under the NBCC. NBCC Mission Director Mohan Chamlagai says that the ME department currently focuses on the following areas:

- a) The M&E department has a goal to start churches in new places where there are no Baptist churches. This also includes a partnership with mission-oriented organizations like Bible colleges, campus crusades, or various mission organizations.
- b) The M&E focuses on providing opportunities for long and short theological education to those who are interested in church ministry. They help by offering financial support and encouragement. They hope that in the future, there will be no shortage of human resources in the NBC.
- c) The M&E also seeks to empower and grow local church leaders, deacons, and pastors by frequently engaging them in workshops, conferences, classes, and meetings (Mohan Chamlagai, personal communication, 27 December 2019).

According to the Mission Director Mohan Chamlagai, NBCC has written a Bidhan or constitution law, where every role and responsibility of NBCC and local churches written down. For churches that have 19 baptized believers or fewer, they considered fellowship or

mission points. If the believers are above the number of 19, then they are declared as a church (Mohan Chamlagai, personal communication, 27 December 2019).

5.9.5 Nepal Baptist Children Fellowship (NBCF)

The NBCC has long felt the need for a group specifically for children. On 21 June 2012, the Nepal Baptist Children Fellowship (NBCF) became the youngest department of NBCC. First, the NBCC created a task force to start the necessary procedures and research on the current situation of children in the local Baptist churches across the country (Asish Tamang, personal communication, 25 February 2019). The study showed that many Baptist churches in rural areas did not conduct Sunday school due to a lack of resources, teaching materials, trained teachers, and curriculum. Therefore, after a long wait and preparation, NBCC started to work towards the goal of all children being adequately trained and equipped with Biblical knowledge and growing in the likeness of God for building healthy churches.

The main objective of the NBCF was to develop curriculum and materials for Sunday school classes based on Baptist values and principles. It also trained Sunday school teachers, lay leaders, youth, and parents in biblical parenting styles so that every church member would be responsive to the needs of children.

Currently, the NBCF partners with Metro World Child (USA) to develop curriculum, lesson plans, and content writings. It has finished the basic, intermediate, and advanced levels and launched a pilot project in thirteen churches in the Kathmandu valley. Asish Tamang, a coordinator of NBCF, has shared the plan to create a five-book series and curriculum development, vision casting, and an introductory workshop with new churches in all the provinces. NBCF trained new teachers, offering biblical parenting and counseling seminars, and frequently visiting new churches to share about the NBCF ministry objectives for children and future generations of the Baptist community in Nepal (Asish Tamang, personal communication, 25 February 2019).

5.9.6 Nepal Baptist Bible College (NBBC)

Since the new churches have been growing steadily, there is a demand for more church leaders in the local churches. In order to fill that gap, NBCC initiated a Biblical training center to produce new leaders who are grounded in solid Baptist biblical teaching (Subash Pradhan, n.d., pg. 2). On 1st June 1998, at the Damak Baptist Church in Jhapa district in eastern Nepal,

the NBCC founded the Nepal Baptist Bible Institute (NBBI). Under the coordination of Rev. Daniel Subba and Rev. Muktinath Sharma, the NBBI started offering a one-month training package called “School of Evangelism and Church Planting Training” on 25th Jan 1999 for (Subash Pradhan, Personal Communication, 16 January 2020). By the year 2019, the 9th cohort of one hundred and twenty-one students graduated and accomplished the milestone of their theological journey with NBCC. This group included one hundred and ten pastors and leaders from the Diploma of Ministry, eight students from the Bachelor of Theology program, and three students from the Master of Divinity program.

Now, there are two kinds of degree programs running. First, the school offers a residential program for the B.Th. (Bachelor in Theology) and MDIV (Master in Divinity). And both focus on youth. The school is planning to make it mission-focused from the year 2020 onwards. Second, they offer a modular program called Pastoral and Leadership Training (PALT), which they implement in villages. This program runs for three years, covering at least four subjects in a year. Currently, there are one hundred and fifteen people enrolled in this modular program. (Subash Pradhan, personal communication, 16 January 2020).

Since its establishment, NBCC has played a significant role in producing and developing new human resources, leaders, and theologians. It is bringing up more leaders and equipping them with Baptist values and faith so that they can contribute to the NBCC.

5.9.7 Multipurpose Community Development Service (MCDS)

In 1994, the Multipurpose Community Development Service (MCDS) registered with the Chief District Officer of Kathmandu District (Regd. 71/051/052) and Social Welfare Council (SWC) of Nepal government as a non-governmental organization (NGO). The MCDS intended to be the social wing of NBCC that would work among marginalized people, like illiterates, poor, and tribal people of rural areas (Chuk Rana, personal communication, 20 December 2019). The primary purpose of establishing the MCDS was to reach people with the Gospel through social activities in different parts of the land. As a result, MCDS launched six sustainable development projects to educate, empower, and develop the communities in Nepal. They are listed below:

- Community Health and Education Project (CHEP)

- Community Health and Engineering for Sustainable Transformation (CHEST)
- Health Education for Lay People (HELP)
- Community-Based Disaster Relief and Recover Project (CBDRRP)
- Community Support and Livelihood Development Project (CSLDP)
- Sustainable Institution Development Project (SIDP)

The six projects are working in health, child education and adult literacy, drinking water and sanitation, agriculture and animal health, disaster management, global warming, community empowerment, and leadership development. MCDS has been working through these projects for 25 years among the rural communities. They strive to reach the oppressed and underprivileged people of Nepal to show God's faithful love through grassroots community transformation.

The MCDS has included evangelism in its community development projects. Through social work, MCDS has planted seeds of their faith in previously unreached communities and people. MCDS has always reached out to local Baptist churches and local community-based organizations (CBO) to include them as stakeholders in the projects. This creates more opportunities for the church to build relationships with local communities. That has also resulted in the project staff getting involved in strengthening churches through teaching, leading fellowship, praying, and volunteering in the church's work. Many of the team learned about Jesus through their work and later converted into Christianity.

While working in the community and church circles, MCDS has started micro saving and credit programs. This program has helped with skill development and enabled Christian laypeople in the community to earn more income and also give more to support the church. It has also helped decrease their financial dependency and boosted local churches to become self-reliant for the ministry (Chuk Rana, personal communication, 20 December 2019).

Since MCDS started working in community development, churches have formed new relationships in many communities. Community people have acknowledged the positive contributions of churches and Christians. After MCDS entered the villages, more people realized that they are a transparent and reliable organization contributing to social

development. This has helped to grow to understand between Christian and non-Christian groups.

5.10 Present Administrative Structure of NBCC

The image included above shows the organizational and administrative structure of NBCC (see appendix no. three for the structure diagrams). On the top, there is the Local Baptist Churches, which consist of 236 churches and 239 mission points (fellowships). According to the NBCC constitution, the local churches are entirely autonomous and independently governed. The NBCC does not interfere with local churches in the area of administration, governance, decision making, and internal affairs. The exception is if the NBCC thinks a church is straying from Baptist doctrines, manuals, and guidelines, or if there is internal conflict. Only in these cases, NBCC has the responsibility to reach out to those churches for counseling, reminding NBCC values and distinctive identity, and collaborating for peacebuilding. Apart from this situation, the local church remains autonomous and holds authority over the NBCC through its General Congress.

To form the General Congress, each local church sends two representatives, and each fellowship (mission points) carries one. These representatives are responsible for electing the Executive Board of NBCC through a democratic voting system. The Executive Board is composed of 12 to 15 members (NBCC Constitute Manual, 2011, p. 10).

For all the regional associations (Provinces 1 to 7) and other departments ((NBWF, NBYF, NBCY, NBBC, M&E, and MCDS), the General Congress elects only the President and the Secretaries who automatically join the NBCC Executive Board as an “*Ex-Officio*” member. The Ex-Officio officers, together with the president, the vice-president, and the treasurer, elect the General Secretary for the NBCC Executive Board. The elected General Secretary is responsible and accountable for everything that takes place between the NBCC, regional associations, departments, local churches, and the partners and with international partners and donors (Jirman Rai, personal communication, 28 December 2019). The general secretary holds the position for five years, whereas the president, the vice-president, and treasurer can hold their position only for three years. Except for the ME and the NBCC, the other departments and regional associations call an election every three years with a notice of one month from the local church representatives. They elect the Executive Board for each regional

association and department. The secretaries of each regional office and the department work full-time for five years in the same manner with NBCC Executive Board, and all of them are accountable to the General Secretary of the NBCC board (NBCC Constitutive Manual, pp. 12-13). The NBCC also forms a different board known as the “loose committee,” which is responsible for the selection of the staff for the ME and the NBCC.

The election process in Congress is entirely democratic. The election committee consists of at least five members who are responsible for the date and the timing of the election process. The committee members selected in two different ways. In one way, the election committee members propose eligible candidates for the various local churches to the congress. The other way is for the election committee to send out forms to every local church five months before the elections, and anyone interested to join can fill out the forms and send it to the election committee fifteen days before the election. The election committee scans through the forms and selects the members who seem capable and eligible for the position and publish their names in the elections list (NBCC Constitutive Manual, 2011, pp. 26-27).

Currently, NBCC has introduced the “five percentage concept,” which states that every local partner church should contribute five percent of its total annual income to the growth and administration expenses of NBCC. However, this concept has been followed and implemented by only a few churches and is not yet accepted by all the local partner churches.

5.11 Chapter Summary

NBCC is a Nepalese Baptist church organization that has an indigenous identity and is committed to serving the Baptist churches in Nepal. The NBCC was not founded by any of the foreign missionaries or mission-oriented organizations but rather was established by young Nepalese. They migrated from Nagaland and Manipur in India. They converted to Christianity there, and after their conversion, they came back to Nepal to share the Gospel and their new faith with their people and community.

This research found that NBCC has a distinctive style of church administration, church management, worship, and leadership-ordaining processes, which contextualized according to the cultural practices and traditions of the local community. Since the beginning, NBCC has only worked in collaboration with international and national Baptist organizations and churches because of the similarity of faith, vision, and doctrines. NBCC has its constitution

and church administration manual. Based on this, all the local churches, regional associations, and departments have been running and functioning.

During the first few years of its existence, NBCC blamed for spreading heresies and cults among the Christian communities and faced opposition from other denominations for practicing new ways of worship, church management, and doctrinal beliefs. Not only this, but they also faced significant financial problems to support the local churches, missionaries, and pastors. Despite all the challenges, however, NBCC remained content and faithful to the mission work and never stopped planting new churches. As a result, Nepal has more than 400 local Baptist churches and mission points all over the country, six different NGOs, four regional associations, women, youth and children departments, Bible schools and theological training institutes, and a Mission and Evangelism Department. NBCC has earned its reputation as a successful and fast-growing church organization in Nepal over its 25 years of existence.

6 Chapter Six: Research Findings

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the research findings on “*A Historical Study of Nepal Baptist Church Council.*” This research was conducted in Nepal through a series of interviews with NBCC with pioneers and current leaders. The interviews were then analyzed along with multiple personal journals, diaries, organizational reports, and published souvenirs. During the whole process, the researcher tried to find out the more in-depth historical accounts of events that took place during the development of NBCC.

The findings are based on memories of NBCC pioneers, analyzed using the oral theory. This involved constructing a historical narrative based on the memories of living witnesses and cross-referencing it with past and current documents. I thoroughly enjoyed conducting this research and witnessing living history. At the same time, I found that the oral theory presented some difficulties. The most challenging part was verifying the facts given in oral interviews from each responder. Because the data was drawn from the memory of each individual, and to some extent, memory can be unreliable, all the evidence was cross-checked with the other sources. Then each source was separated by facts and fiction. The second difficulty was the

consistency of narration. Each individual tended to exaggerate good incidents and minimize or ignore the bad things that happened. Therefore, to some extent, the information in this thesis leans toward the positive exaggeration. Apart from these issues, the oral theory was applicable and effective for recording history and creating a narrative out of memories.

During the research process, the most challenging part was meeting and arranging the interview times with each responder. This was due to a limited amount of my time in Nepal and the need to visit different locations. Secondly, a few responders who I met and interviewed were not very comfortable answering the questions and telling the facts. This might be due to the organizational confidentiality or fear of their personal issues being disclosed. Thirdly, it was very tough to get in-depth information about some problems like donor details, ordaining women pastors, and conflict issues within past and current leadership. I regret that I was unable to bring a more in-depth level of discussion and understanding.

The findings are based on interviews and analysis of various documentation that was written about NBCC by different personnel involved with NBCC over the years. In the sections below, the findings reveal the multiple strategies that NBCC applied to achieve fast growth over 25 years and how they did this in a multi-religious, multicultural, multi-linguistic, and multi-denominational context where foreign religions were persecuted. During the interview and analysis process, I have found the precise strategies and administrative systems that boosted NBCC's growth to another level. This chapter also presents the areas where NBCC is lacking and can work on strengthening itself and the Baptist churches in Nepal

6.2 Major Accomplishments of NBCC's 25 years of Existence

6.2.1 Church Growth

Over the past 25 years of existence as a religious and social organization, NBCC has focused primarily on church planting and sharing the Gospel. They did this either by sending missionaries or reaching people through social programs. The next sections explain how these activities were crucial to the growth of churches through NBCC.

6.2.1.1 Individual Evangelism

During the initial period when young men returned from northeast India, they felt renewed with a new faith eventually, when they decided to return to Nepal, they were eager to share

the Gospel with their own people. According to this analysis, the early evangelism was without an excellent theological understanding. They started practicing individual evangelism based on their own experiences and conversion through one-to-one communication with missionaries in Nagaland.

Personal evangelism defined as an act of one-to-one sharing about religion, and in this case, Christianity. Often evangelism involves talking about the Life of Christ and helping other people to find salvation in Christ. The New Testament presents Jesus as someone who practiced personal evangelism with many individuals (Matt. 19:16-24, John 4: 4-42) by crossing social boundaries and disregarding social stigma and taboos during those days. Later, Paul, the Apostle, showed how effective and powerful personal evangelism is by living and exemplifying it through his writings (Gal. 2:20, 1Cor. 10:31, Acts 9:35, 42; 11:24).

Following the model of Jesus and Paul, the NBCC pioneers started focusing on one-to-one and door-to-door evangelism with their neighbors, family, and friends. NBCC also trained pastors and leaders to teach every church member and believer. They wanted to encourage them to do personal evangelism in their surrounding communities and families as well. This focus on personal evangelism from the beginning fueled NBCC church growth so that it far exceeded the pioneer leaders' expectations. They multiplied from eight churches in the beginning to more than 400, including church and mission points in only 25 years. Without personal evangelism, especially the emphasis on church members doing it as well played a vital role in the growth of the Baptist church in Nepal.

6.2.1.2 Evangelistic Crusades

The Evangelistic Crusades, practiced since the mid-17th-century Great Awakening period in England and American colonies, were primarily driven by church leaders preaching to large crowds of people and mass meetings. This mass evangelism strategy became popular in Nepal as well during the 1990s. The Baptist pioneers partnered with Outreach to Asia Nation (OTAN) from 1997 to 1999 for mass evangelism and organizing many evangelical crusades in the different cities, regions, and districts. They did not only share the Gospel, but they also performed miracles. Some say they healed people from their diseases, which compelled many people to believe in the new religion. Despite the persecution and rejection from their own people, many people converted to Christianity. As a result, the churches were not prepared for

the amount of work it took for long-term, effective discipleship, like following up to engage new converts.

Nevertheless, they pushed for one more year to conduct outreach evangelism with the help of evangelists, missionaries, deacons, pastors, and every church member. They followed up with local churches on a weekly and monthly basis. That effort helped NBCC to keep more people coming to church and continue to grow. From an academic perspective, the push to convert people through crusades sounds exaggerated; however, I witnessed the effectiveness of this process in Nepal and saw how churches were established. As a person who converted from Christianity to Hinduism, I can validate that accepting a foreign religion in Nepal is a challenging thing to do and almost impossible without feeling a divine intervention within myself. Therefore, the crusade conversions were a milestone for the growth of NBCC.

6.2.1.3 Sending Missionaries

This research found that the NBCC prioritized sending missionaries to unreached areas of Nepal. Missionaries were supported, in part, by foreign aid but also by local churches. Initially, the NBCC sponsored over 100 missionaries to go to new places. The number of missionaries sent has increased over the years as more local churches contribute to send missionaries to different parts of Nepal. It shows that mission work is at the heart of NBCC. NBCC sets an example for not only Baptist churches but also other mission partners who want to engage the local level and raise funds in a practical, long-term strategy. Unfortunately, I did not find any specific plans within NBCC to create a long-term strategy for raising the local level funds and sustaining the mission goals. It looks like sending missionaries, and church planting are still top priorities, but they lack a plan for the future. I assume that if donors decrease their funds, NBCC will have to reduce the missionaries they send.

6.3 Organizational Growth

In general, Baptist churches are more concerned with administration structure and function compared to other Christian denominations. That tradition helped NBCC to function without any doubt or confusion. The following section presents the various factors that helped NBCC to grow as a religious organization.

6.3.1 Administrative Structure

This research found that the organizational growth of NBCC was made possible by its well-established administration structure and leadership model. Since the beginning, the NBCC focused on equipping good leaders to have a deep understanding of the organization's mission, vision, and goals. Additionally, the division of regional associations, mission departments, social aid programs, and children and youth departments strengthened the administration by mobilizing local churches and communities.

Overall, the NBCC sets an excellent example of proper organization administration and strong leadership. Their statement of faith, church manuals, doctrines, and ideologies are written and implemented precisely, including Baptist doctrinal teachings. Apart from this, organizational development training was also given to the pastors, leaders, and members of the organization to strengthen them and help their churches function smoothly. The following chapter presents the NBCC administrative strengths and growth factors.

6.3.2 Regional Divisions

The biggest strength of NBCC as an umbrella organization has been its ability to decentralize and allow the local, district, and regional levels to coordinate and share information as their yearly achievements, failures, and lessons learned. According to all of the informants, all four regional associations--BCAP-1, BCAP-2, 3, BCAP – 4, 5, and BCAP- 6, 7--have played a tremendous role in strengthening the NBCC. The primary purpose of starting regional associations was to decentralize the power, control, and give regional associations authority over the local churches. This decentralization gave more responsibility to regional associations to look after local churches, and build relationships with local leaders, churches, and mission points. It also freed up the NBCC to seek resources and international partnerships. The cooperation between regional associations and local churches relied on clear communication about yearly plans, goals, and activity timelines.

6.3.3 Mobilizing Youth and Women groups in the Local Churches

During this research, I inspired by the contribution and mobilization of women and youth groups in local churches. In the context of the Hindu-dominated society where women treated as second class citizens, the Baptist churches seemed to be giving opportunities for women to exercise their capacity and talents. It was the beginning of a radical revolution in Nepalese

society. The women and youth groups were and still are allowed to exercise leadership within churches and beyond, by preaching, teaching, inspiring, traveling, singing, dancing, working outside of the church, and participating in decision making. This significantly impacted young women and youth by encouraging them to chase their dreams and cross social and religious boundaries. As a result of mobilizing women and youth within local Baptist churches, there was more energy and positivity brought into the organization. It also led to the decision to start a children's department in 2015. Including women, youth, and children was a way for the NBCC to practice their belief that all humans add value in society.

6.3.4 Impact through Non-Profit Aid

Another essential aspect of NBCC's work that led to organizational growth was its non-profit aid work in local communities. They helped to improve the social, economic, and cultural conditions through holistic development programs among non-Christian communities in Nepal. While building relationships with these communities, the NBCC also shared and preached the Gospel. They reached many poor and marginalized communities, often those who were neglected by the government, by showing compassion and kindness in the model of Christ.

The interviews revealed that NBCC has been contributing to social development, public health initiatives, education, environmental issues, income generation, disaster management, and capacity building through its non-profit organizations. These efforts have impacted local people by improving their livelihoods and wellbeing. In doing so, it also helped change their perspective of NBCC, not only as a religious institution but one that is a service provider for those in need. It helped shift some of the negative views that non-Christians had about Christians as well as opened the way for more people to learn about Christianity.

NBCC also cooperated with the Nepal government to build roads, bridges, household toilets, stoves, solar systems, and water irrigation. They also provided stoves and set up HIV prevention camps in different districts and provinces. Their collaboration left a positive influence on the communities and the government sector.

6.4 Strengths of NBCC Church Governing

6.4.1 Local Autonomous Model

Another aspect of the NBCC that facilitated its growth was the autonomous governance model of local churches. According to NBCC's statement of faith, they believe that a church is the body of Christ built by believers, which carries more authority than an organization. The churches make up the associations, and the associations collectively form the NBCC, which in turn mobilizes all the departments. Therefore, NBCC gives total freedom to each department to run by itself, including all the churches with a shared understanding of faith. The autonomous system offers the freedom to local churches to govern themselves, except in times of conflict and questions of faith and doctrinal issues. In those cases, the NBCC will step in to mediate or address the issue. Apart from this, NBCC allows every local church to run its administration, events, plans, and activities without interference from NBCC and other international organizations.

In the interviews, local church pastors expressed that this autonomous model has given them the independence to grow within their local culture, ethnicity, and context in different parts of Nepal. This autonomous model taught each church to be independent and self-sustaining while maintaining good cooperation and partnership with NBCC.

6.4.2 Healthy and Sustainable Church Development Program

NBCC introduced the concept of healthy churches based on the training module called the "Healthy and Sustainable Church Development Program." According to NBCC Executive Board members, this training module was conducted in each local Baptist church, no matter how big or small. This training module focused on how to equip church leaders, pastors, youth, and women groups to build a healthy and economically sustainable church. NBCC brought teachings and started conversations in their Baptist churches that rarely happened in other Christian churches in Nepal.

One of the most interesting aspects was how they helped the churches become financially sustainable and healthy. The program focused on increasing the financial security of each church member by providing income resources like small business loans, entrepreneurship training, and skills training in tailoring, farming, and investing in the stock market.

As individuals grew more financially secure, the program played a vital role in helping each church to be independent and self-sufficient. The churches were able to support the pastors, missionaries, and church workers without depending on any foreign support. This is one of the major models that could help other organizations to become self-sufficient and sustainable too.

6.5 NBCC's Areas for Improvement

Despite all their effective and influential work in the church and community, NBCC lacks in some essential areas. The following sections are the areas in which the NBCC can consider addressing to strengthen its organization and relationships.

6.5.1 Leadership Development

In general, leadership plays a vital role in the growth of any church or organization. Good leadership determines the wellbeing of an organization and even its effectiveness. Based on my observations with interviewees, it seemed that the current leaders did not regard future leadership development as an essential thing to invest in. They are not focusing on preparing the next generation and by equipping young people. They must help youth grow spiritually, be educated, develop social and entrepreneurial skills, and cross-cultural exposure and understanding.

In recent times, it looks like most of the first-generation leaders are working to sustain the NBCC and expand the ministry to neighboring countries. NBCC leaders, however, have focused on the mission, evangelism, and social activities without including the next generation of leaders. The current activities of NBCC could be used to develop younger people who can help run the organization as the other leaders get old. I can assume that whatever mission and goals that NBCC has established can also be carried out by the young leaders who are prepared and equipped with the same vision as the current leadership.

6.5.2 Lack of Good Relationship with Rural Churches

In my opinion, this is one of the significant issues that NBCC faces immediately. According to the congregational church administrative system (followed by NBCC), the authority and power decentralized to the regional association. It means that the NBCC Council has given all the power and authority to the regional associations. This has led to some confusion within the

functional administrative structure of NBCC (Regional associations and the church) regarding the distribution of work among the Council, regional sub-offices, and the rural churches. Because of this confusion, some of the churches have stopped being accountable to the NBCC. They have and stopped taking responsibility for providing human resources, volunteer time, prayers, and sharing information and even financial support with the NBCC.

Another issue that has arisen due to poor communication between the NBCC and the rural churches is that most of the regional churches located in remote areas. Some of them do not even know about the existence of NBCC. The representatives from NBCC rarely visit those remote areas. This means the relationship between the NBCC and those rural churches is very weak or nonexistent.

Finally, the major drawback of being a member of the NBCC is that each church has to give 5% of its earnings (e.g., from tithes or offerings) to the NBCC. This has led to significant confusion regarding their administrative structure. According to Pastor Daniel Subba, founder and president of NBCC;

“The presence of multiple churches forms the regional associations, which in turn forms the council. Therefore, the churches have the right to decide how much amount they are willing to provide to the council. The amount will be first given to the regional associations, which will then decide on the amount given to the council. But the NBCC is now approaching churches to send their contribution directly to the council, which will then divide the money among the regional associations. It is not an appropriate system because it goes against the congregational church structure.” The relationship between all the parts of the NBCC administration has not been adequately defined. Therefore this has prevented a proper connection and proper function within the council, region, and churches.”

6.6 Recommendations

NBCC has contributed a lot to the growth of the Baptist churches in Nepal, primarily through missions and social work among the needy and poor people in different regions and districts of Nepal. The hard work and sacrifices of the early pioneers brought NBCC into existence

despite cultural, religious, and denominational hindrances. I find this to be a tremendously brave act of faith considering the challenges they faced in the Hindu-dominated society.

However, despite all the success and growth, the NBCC has continued to use the structures and traditions set up by their past leaders. They follow the guidelines and manuals that were created by the founding leaders. On the one hand, it is good to preserve the traditional and cultural practices passed on by the elders. At the same time, however, the NBCC risks declining if they are not able to adapt to the advances in modern technology, globalization, and changing societal values. The gap of understanding between generations is growing unless the young and old can have open conversations.

My first recommendation is for the old and young to communicate and find new ways to respect each other's worldview. As nations and cultures shift more towards more secularism and individualism, the church needs to meet that challenge by understanding the shifting cultural values, ideas, and personalities of the young generation. If the churches stick to the old-fashioned ways of working, the youth may not want to hear about the Gospel or be a part of the church. Examples of the generational gaps include youth wanting to use western musical instruments and play western worship music, the use of modern technology and social media in church, and promoting youth and women in leadership positions. The older generation of church leaders resisted all of these things and thought the youth did not have the experience or responsibility for leadership. On the other hand, young Baptist members are heavily influenced by western culture and modern worldviews, especially in the way they interpret Biblical texts and biblical values as they pertain to music, dress, marriage, relationships, leadership, and social responsibilities. If the churches stick only to the old ways of working, the youth may not want to hear about the Gospel or be a part of the church.

Secondly, I have observed that most urban churches are close to the NBCC and have human resources to mobilize. However, they are neglecting the rural churches. It might be because of communication access or lack of transportation to access some of the remote areas. As a result of this disconnect, they are losing their feeling of oneness, belonging, and responsibility with the NBCC. It seems like an urgent act from NBCC is essential to re-establish good relationships and bring those churches back. The NBCC should give the same attention to rural churches as it does with the urban ones.

Thirdly, unlike the self-sustaining local churches, the NBCC mostly depends on donors to run its admin and non-profit work. If a donor is unable to send the funds to support the NBCC mission and administration work, it will become difficult for NBCC to sustain its social work. It is very urgent that the NBCC must start seeking ways to generate its own funds, perhaps in partnership with local churches and local partners.

Fourthly, the NBCC should focus on building healthy relationships with various other Christian denominations in Nepal. They should look for opportunities to work together in peace and harmony without the barrier of denominational differences in faith or practice. It would be for the betterment and propagation of Christianity and society as a whole. Instead of competing, they should cooperate to establish more schools, hospitals, colleges. It would also help more church members to have access to resources and hopefully become financially independent.

6.7 Conclusion

After the Reformation in the 16th century, various expressions of Christian faith emerged and practiced over many centuries. One of them was the Baptist group that came from Anabaptist and English Separatists. This Baptist faith was carried to India by the first modern missionary, William Carey, in 1793. In 1993, the early NBCC pioneers, who converted to Christianity in northeast India in the 1980s, brought the Baptist tradition to Nepal. They were motivated to share the Gospel with their own people. The Baptists grew in size until they formed the Nepal Baptist Church Council (NBCC).

During the 25 years of its existence, the NBCC has faced many challenges. They were discriminated against and harassed by the government to other Christians and non-Christians. During the ups and downs, NBCC remained committed to reaching out and growing their influence, even in the remote areas. Over time, the NBCC grew and linked up with international Baptist partners, formed regional associations, various departments, non-profit programs, and equipped more than 200 pastors and leaders to serve in more than 236 churches and 239 cell groups. Approximately 20,000 baptized believers converted from other religions in those 25 years. This growth in itself is a tremendous accomplishment made possible by the hard work of the pioneers.

The NBCC has developed a clear administrative structure, policies, a church management manual, and a statement of faith and practices. These clearly defined structures and policies helped to establish the church hierarchy and run the loose associations and departments under the NBCC. This is a definite strength of the NBCC.

One of the positive and unique features of the NBCC is its indigenous identity. The NBCC takes pride in being established as a separate independent Nepali Baptist organization. The NBCC has its own style of Church administration, church management, and worship styles that are heavily influenced by Nepalese style culture. The leaders and pastors are appointed ordained in ways that are contextualized according to the Nepali culture and traditions.

Though the NBCC has been through lots of opposition from the other denominations, the government, and internal problems arising from the lack of human and financial resources, the NBCC has persevered and established itself as one of the well-known Christian organizations in Nepal. Additionally, the NBCC has embraced a mission of both evangelism and social responsibility, thereby fulfilling its social and religious obligation to help the poor and needy.

The history of the NBCC demonstrates how a small faith group followed a mission from God to grow their church, help the poor, share their faith, and help people gain financial security. Despite the risks and fear of persecution from society and the government, they were obedient to God and persevered. Just as it is written in the book of Mark 16:15, the NBCC followed the call to “Go into the world and preach the Gospel to the whole creation.

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Appendix 1

First NBCC Meeting Attendees Name List

- | | |
|----------------------------|--|
| 1. Rev. Daniel Subba | Itahari Baptist Church, Sunsari |
| 2. Mrs. Jasmayasubba | Itahari Baptist Church, Sunsari |
| 3. Mr. Rajman Tamang | Itahari Baptist Church, Sunsari |
| 4. Mr. Ganga B.k | Itahari Baptist Church, Sunsari |
| 5. Mr. Homnath Gautam | Itahari Baptist Church, Sunsari |
| 6. Mr. Shiva Kumar Sunuwar | Itahari Baptist Church, Sunsari |
| 7. Rev. Pastor Hari Gurung | Pokhara Baptist Church, Kaski
(Current senior pastor of Dhapakhel Baptist Church, Lalitpur) |
| 8. Mr. Samuel Sagraham Rai | Pokhara Baptist Church, Kaski |
| 9. Mr. Datembar Sherpa | Pokhara Baptist Church, Kaski |
| 10. Mr. Ashman Rai | Dibyabani Baptist Church, Udaypur
(Currently in the United Kingdom, London at present) |
| 11. Mr. Lal Nepali | Dhankuta Baptist Church, Dhankuta |

(Source: minute book of NBCC, 1993)

Appendix 2

A. First Executive Board Member Name List

1.	President	Rev. Daniel Subba	Itahari Baptist Church
2.	Vice- President	Rev. RatnaBdr. Rai	Saralung Baptist Church
3.	Secretary	Rev. HariGurung	Pokhara Baptist Church
4.	Treasurer	Ganga B.K.	Itahari Baptist Church
5.	Coordinator	Samuel Rai	Pokhara Baptist Church
6.	Member	Lal Nepali	Dhankuta Baptist Church
7.	Member	Ps. Asman Rai	Dibyabani Baptist Church
8.	Member	HomnathGautam	Itahari Baptist Church
9.	Member	Rajman Rai	Itahari Baptist Church

(Source: minute book of NBCC, 1993)

B. NBCC Presidents from 1993 to 2019

1. Rev. Daniel Subba
2. Rev. Hari Gurung
3. Rev. Tula Sing Rai
4. Rev. Lal Sing Gurung
5. Rev. Ratna Bahadur Rai

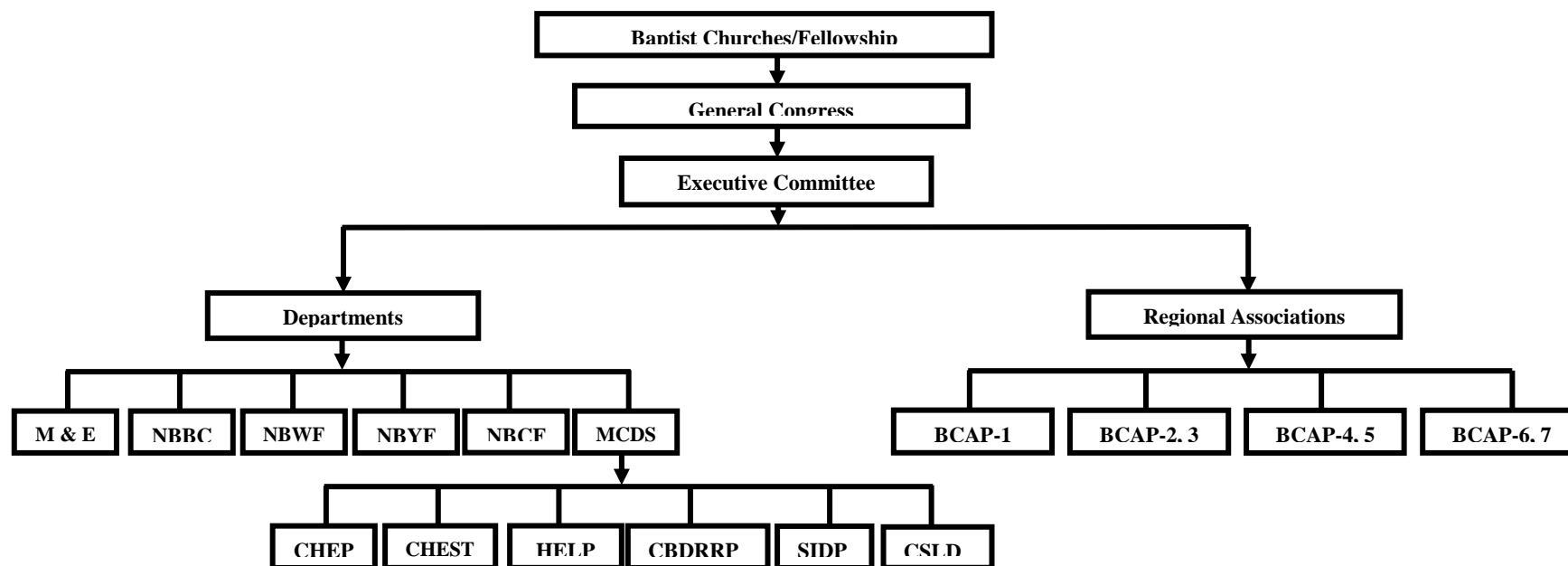
C. Founding Churches of NBCC

1. Itahari Baptist Church
2. Pokhara Baptist Church
3. Saralung Baptist Church
4. Chhemsune Baptist Church
5. Udayapur Baptist Church

6. Letang Baptist Church
7. Bharatpur Baptist Church
8. Dhankuta Baptist Church

Appendix 3

Present Administrative Structure of NBCC



1. M&E : Mission and Evangelism
2. NBBC : Nepal Baptist Bible College
3. NBWF : Nepal Baptist Women Fellowship
4. NBYF : Nepal Baptist Youth Fellowship
5. NBCF : Nepal Baptist Children Fellowship
6. MCDS : Multipurpose Community Development Service

1. CHPE : Community Health and Education Project
2. CHEST : Community Health and Engineering for Social Transformation
3. HELP : Health Education For Lay People
4. CBDRRP : Community Based Disaster Relief and Recovery Project
5. SIDP : Sustainable Institution Development Project
6. CSLD : Community Support and Livelihood Development Project

1. BCAP-1 : Baptist Church Association Province-1
2. BCAP-2,3 : Baptist Church Association Province-2,3
3. BCAP-4,5 : Baptist Church Association Province-4,5
4. BCAP-6,7 : Baptist Church Association Province-6,7

Appendix 4

Interviewees List

1. Prof. U.J. Gurung Interviewed on May 17, 2019.
2. Rev. Daniel Subba Interviewed on December 11, 2019.
3. Rev. Dr. Hari Gurung Interviewed on December 16, 2019
4. Rev. Dr. Samuel Rai Interviewed on December 22, 2019
5. Rev. Ratna Rai Interviewed on December 23, 2019
6. Rev. Jirman Rai Interviewed on December 28, 2019
7. Pastor Mohan Chamlagai Interviewed on December 27, 2019
8. Pastor Chuk Rana Magar Interviewed on February 20, 2019
9. Pastor Gopal Dhahal Interviewed on January 20, 2020
10. Pastor Manoj Shrestha Interviewed on December 20, 2019
11. Subash Pradhan Interviewed on January 16, 2019
12. Prem N. Bhattarai Interviewed on December 27, 2019
13. Shanti Rai Interviewed on December 28, 2019
14. Asish Tamang Interviewed on February 25, 2020
15. Mala Rai Interviewed on January 2, 2020
16. Mina Thapa Interviewed on January 20, 2020

Appendix 5

Interview Questionnaire

A. For NBCC founder members

1. How/ When/ Where did your conversion into Christianity happen (basically their faith conversion Testimony)?
2. How/When did you become involved in the Baptist Mission in Nepal? Do you know the background of the Baptist mission coming to the Nepali territory?
3. How/ When/ Where/ by whom did the concept of NBCC become established in Nepal?
4. What were the difficulties/challenges and persecution during the initial period of NBCC? (From Government side and other denominational leaders; within the church communities)
5. What was the contribution of pioneers in the establishments of NBCC and its growth and success?
6. What is the right side of NBCC and its weaknesses/ failures or factors to improve on in the future?
7. Are you happy with the current leadership with NBCC? Are they leading NBCC according to the same mission/vision/goal and passion the pioneers had when it was established?
8. What were contributions from women in establishing NBCC? (Now and initial period)
9. What are the impacts and influences that spread through the work of NBCC in Nepali communities?
10. How does the NBCC define the role of women in the church and organization?
11. Any additional information?

12. Any questions for the researcher?

B. For Current Leadership team of NBCC

1. How/ When/ Where did your conversion into Christianity happen (basically their faith conversion Testimony)?
2. How/When did you become involved with the Baptist Mission in Nepal? Do you know the background of the Baptist mission coming to the Nepali territory?
3. Do you know the background of the NBCC establishment in Nepal? (story of Pioneers and their contribution)
4. What is your role with NBCC, and how long have you been working with it?
5. What are the current projects and mission work going on through NBCC? How many churches and fellowships are there from different states?

C. For Lay Pastor and Church Members

1. Have you ever heard about the history of NBCC through other leaders of NBCC? Do you have anything to share with me?
2. Do you know anything about the Baptist Mission entering to Nepali territory?
3. Are you happy with NBCC in terms of Leadership? Contribution to local churches and communities? And their project models?
4. Do you think NBCC reaches out more to Urban churches then Rural areas? Especially to Hilly regions?
5. Are you satisfied with the NBCC partnership?
6. What do you think the NBCC's strengths and weaknesses are in terms of church partnership, mobilization, mission work, and partnership with local churches?
7. What are the impacts and influences that spread through the work of NBCC in local communities and local churches?

Appendix 6

NBCC plan 2020 to 2030

Goal 1: Mobilize local churches to establish new churches

Goal 2: Develop capable Christian leaders for mission in all areas of society

Goal 3: Conduct humanitarian and social work as a part of integral mission

Goal 4: Facilitate organizational development programs

Goal 5: Develop Partnerships to achieve the goal

Appendix 8

Few Photographs of NBCC Activities

Sources of Pictures: NBCC Administration



Picture 1 Saralung Baptist Church, Khotang.



Picture 2 Itahari Baptist Church, Itahari.



Picture 3 Dingla Baptist Church, Bhojpur.



Picture 4 Leadership Training, Butwal.



Picture 5 Mission Trip By Rev. Him Bdr. Gurung and Rev. Jirman Rai.



Picture 6 Rev. Jirman Rai Preaching in Local Church.



Picture 7 Bible Study with Youth.



Picture 8 Church Leadership Training.



Picture 9 Teacher teaching to Bible College Student.



Picture 10 Bible College Graduation Ceremony.



Picture 11 Youth and Leaders Freinship Football Match.



Picture 12 NBCC Silver Jubilee Celebration.



Figure 13 Discipleship Training Church Leaders and Youth.



Figure 14 Youth Leading Worship in Church Fellowship.



Figure 15 Pastor and Leadership Training.



Figure 16 Local Church Youth Leaders preparing for program.