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Challenges for Christianity in Nepali Context

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Abstract

This research has explored about the various religious and social struggles, challenges, problems and negotiations faced by Nepalese Christians in the Hindu dominant country, Nepal. When we see the outer part of the society we can find the harmonious relationship among all religions but when we study deeply we can find various hierarchies in the society. Being marginal religious groups in the society, Christians have been struggling continuously to preserve their religious identity by embracing and developing their religion. This research has also uncovered the views of some Hindus members in the society about the emergence of Christianity in Nepal, reasons behind conversion into Christianity and reactions of society after conversion. Data are collected by the help of oral and written interviews and various components of qualitative research methods are applied as methodologies to carry out this research. Significant conceptual theories like identity, religion and religious conversion are studied by the help of literature reviews and later used them to analyze the collected data. In this research, Nepalese Christian societies are investigated and studied in several topics for example; Social problems of Nepalese Christians, significance of Christian organizations in Nepal, role of Nepalese government towards Christianity, Struggles of Christians past to present, reasons behind conversion, views from Hindu members in the society about Christianity, construction of the Church and reasons of converting especially poor and lower caste people in the society. Though, there are still some discriminations and challenges in the some parts of the country, Christian societies in Nepal have achieved a lot and they are successful to establish their own religious identity in present days.

<u>Table of Contents</u>	<u>Page No</u>
Acknowledgement	1
Abstract	2
Table of Contents	3
Chapter 1: General Introduction of the Thesis	5
1.1 Introduction	5
1.2 Research questions and data analysis	5
1.3 Brief introduction of Nepal	6
1.4 Religions in Nepal	8
1.5 Christianity in Nepal	9
1.6 Hinduism in Nepal	10
1.7 Relation between Christian and other religions	11
1.8 Purpose and significant of the thesis	12
1.9 Religion as a tool to create identity	13
1.10 Religious conversion in the context of Nepal	14
1.11 Research design and organization of the thesis	16
Chapter 2: Research Method	19
2.1 Introduction	19
2.2 Why qualitative research method?	19
2.3 Research population	20
2.4 Interview questions	21
2.5 Scope and limitation of the study	23
2.6 Collection of the data and challenges	23
2.7 How the data are analyzed?	24
2.8 Semi structured interview	25
2.9 Reliability and validity of Research	25
2.10 Ethical Consideration	26
2.11 Conclusion	27
Chapter 3: Conceptual Tools Discussion	29
3.1 Identity	29

3.2 Religion and Identity	33
3.3 Conversion of Religion	36
Chapter 4: Data Presentation and Analysis	47
4.1 Social problems faced by Nepalese Christians	49
4.2 Social activities of Christian organization	54
4.3 Support from Nepalese government to Christian societies	59
4.4 The condition of Christianity in Nepal: Past to present	62
4.5 Various reasons behind conversion	65
4.6 Reactions from the non Christian society after conversion	70
4.7 Construction of the Church in the Hindu dominant society	72
4.8 Christianity: Especial attraction for poor and low caste people in the society	74
4.9 Over view	77
Chapter 5: Conclusion	79
Chapter 6: Bibliographies	82

Challenges for Christianity in Nepali Context

Chapter 1: Introduction

1. General Introduction of the Thesis

1.1 Introduction

The topic of my Masters Degree thesis, **Challenges for Christianity in Nepali Context** refers to the various conflicts, obstacles, negotiations and reconciliations, which have been facing by Christianity and Christians in the context of Nepal. Off course in most of the places, there is mutual relationship among Christians and other religious groups, however being a minor religion; Christianity has been facing numerous political, economical, social and cultural challenges. According to the Census (2011), published on Statistical year book of Nepal (2013), only 1.4 percent of people were Christian and 81.3 percent were Hindus. When we study the Nepalese societies, we find that most of the political and social norms are Hindu favorable and Christians have been facing various social obstacles and challenges in society which is interested subject for me to carry out this research. By taking the help of data collection method, this research has explored distinguishes social struggles of Nepalese Christians since past to present.

1.2 Research Questions and data analysis.

Research question is the core part of the any research. In this thesis, by the help of these research questions I have explored the ups and down of Nepalese Christians in present Nepalese society. I have attempted to explore one major research question and two sub- research questions in this thesis. The primary research question is: (1) What are the social and religious problems have been facing by Nepalese Christians in the Society? And the other two secondary research question are (I) What are the views of non- Christians (Hindus) towards Christians? And (II) what are the reasons behind conversion to Christianity and what reactions do converts meet after converting?

In order to explore my research questions, I have done field research by the help of interview questions. My research questions were related on Nepali Christians and -non Christians therefore, my eight participants, out of twelve were from Christian background and four respondents were from non Christian background. I have expected that the acts of interview and

data collection are helpful to solve my research questions. Furthermore, I have taken the help of various literary books and magazines which are related to Christianity in Nepal. The theories about Identity, religion and conversion are supporting concepts to analyze the data of this research. This research has tried to explore and analyze the social problems of Nepali Christians, social activities, support from Nepalese government's towards Christianity, past and present scenarios of Nepali Christians, reasons behind conversion, reactions from the society after conversion in to Christianity, reactions about building churches in the society and reasons behind conversion especially poor and lower caste people.

1.3 Brief Introduction of Nepal



Image Name: Map of Nepal

Image source: <https://www.lonelyplanet.com>

According to Nepali constitution (2015), translated in to English by Nepal Law Commission, “Nepal is an independent, indivisible, sovereign, secular, inclusive, democratic, socialism-oriented, federal democratic republican state”. There are equal rights and laws for all citizens in Nepal. The Nepali constitution(2015) further explains, “No discrimination shall be made in the

application of general laws on grounds of origin, religion, race, caste, tribe, sex, physical condition, condition of health, marital status, pregnancy, economic condition, language or region, ideology or on similar other grounds”. In *Encyclopedia of Global Religion*, Roof, W. C., & Juergensmeyer, M. have given the introduction of Nepal in the following ways;

Nepal is a democratic republic located along the southern region of the Himalayan range, bordering India to the south, west, and east and the Tibetan autonomous region of China to the north. Though a small country in geographic terms (approximately 54,362 square miles [1 mile = 1.6093 kilometers]), its population of approximately 29.5 million people is a complex and heterogeneous mix of both Indo-European and Tibeto-Burman ethnic groups and castes, each with distinct languages and religious and cultural traditions (Roof & Juergensmeyer 2012: 882).

Nepal is a small and naturally beautiful country in south Asia and it is located between India and China. The geography of Nepal is constructed by mountains, hill and plain land. “Total area of Nepal is 147,181-sq. km. Out of this snow covered mountainous region covers 15% whereas mountainous region and terai cover 68% and 17% respectively”(Vidya 2008:01). The main economic sources of Nepal are agriculture and tourism. It is a multi linguistic and multi cultural country. Majupuria and Majupuria inform about the various languages spoken in Nepal in such ways;

It is a multi- cultural and multi language country. National language is Nepali and there are other dialects too. There are about 22 major languages spoken in Nepal. These are Nepali, Maithili, Bhojpuri, Tharu, Tamang, Newari, Awadhi, Rai- Kiranti, Limbu- Magar, Gurung, Limbu, Rajbanshi, Satar, Dunwar, Bhotia-sherpa, Sunawar, Santhal, Thakali, Urdu, etc. (Some scholars say that there are 6 dialects in Nepal) (Majupuria and Majupuria 2008:13).

Nepal is also famous for Mount Everest and birth place of Lord Buddha. Every year many tourists come to visit Nepal to climb mountains and visit the birth place of Buddha. Dr. Vidya S. describes, “Apart from the highest peak of the world Mount Everest, Nepal is also famous for the birthplace of the Light of Asia, Lord Buddha”(Vidya2008: 01). Nepal is a peaceful and developing country with lots of natural resources like rivers, mountains and forests. It is an independent and republic country which was created by Shah King, Prithvi Narayan Shah in 18th century. Regarding the political changes since past to present in Nepal Roof, W. C., & Juergensmeyer, M. further describe:

In the late 18th century, the Gorkha king Prithvi Narayan Shah consolidated the territories of what is today Nepal, and his descendants ruled Nepal as a Hindu kingdom throughout most of the country's history. Following a 10-year Maoist insurgency and decades of off and on protests and grassroots movements for democracy by political parties and marginalized ethnic and religious groups, in May 2008, Nepal was declared a federal constitutional republic, and Nepalis elected their first president in the newly secular state (Roof & Juergensmeyer 2012: 882).

1.4 Religions in Nepal

Nepal is a Hindu dominant country where more than 80 percent people are Hindu. According to the Nepalese census (2011) which was published in Statistical year book of Nepal (2013), "81.3% of the Nepalese population was Hindu, 9.0% was Buddhist, 4.4% was Muslim, 3.0% was Kiratist (indigenous ethnic religion), 1.4% was Christian, 0.2% was Sikhs, 0.1% was Jains and 0.6% follows other religions or no religion". All the people in Nepal are free to practice their own religion. In the Nepali constitution (2015), preamble number 26 it is written that "Every person who has faith in religion shall have the freedom to profess, practice and protect his or her religion according to his or her conviction". As I already informed that Nepal is a Hindu dominant country therefore most of the rituals, traditions and social practices are Hindu favorable. In the case of minor religions they have been facing numerous social challenges and struggling to achieve their religious right. People are not free to convert their religion. The constitution of Nepal (2015) itself is in controversial. In the same article 26 of the constitution also stated that, "No one shall attempt to change or convert someone from one religion to another, or disturb/jeopardize the religion of others, and such acts/activities shall be punishable by law". After studying the society of Nepal and its constitution, we can say that minor religions are still not getting freedom to practice their religion and they have been struggling with government for their rights. "With the rise of Hindu nationalism in India and the weakening of Hindu royal power in Nepal, Hindu nationalist groups formed in Nepal in the 1990s and since then continue to agitate, sometimes violently, for a Hindu national identity and the suppression of religious freedoms for minorities" (Roof & Juergensmeyer 2012:883). In the below table, I have given the current population of various religions in Nepal which was published by Statistical Year Book of Nepal (2013).

The total population of Nepal is 26 494 504. In the given figure I have presented the total numbers of different religious followers.

Religions	Total Numbers	Percentage
Hindus	21 551 492	81.3
Buddhism	2 396 099	9.0
Islam	1 162 370	4.4
Kirat	807 169	3.0
Christianity	375 699	1.4
Others	201 675	0.9

Source: Statistical Year Book of Nepal (2013)

1.5 Christianity in Nepal

Christianity is a fifth most practiced religion in Nepal with 375,699 adherents, or 1.4% of the population according to the census (2011). When we go back in the history of Nepal, the first Christians in Nepal were Capuchin fathers and they were on their way to establish a mission in Lhasa (Tibet). Various missionaries used to travel India to Tibet through Nepal. “Finally with the consent of the Malla Kings, the Capuchin fathers established a mission in 1715 in Kathmandu valley” (Majupuria and Majupuria 2008:330). “When Shah King, Prithvi Narayan Shah came in to power he closed Christianity in Nepal and Nepal remained closed to Christianity for almost 200 years” (Ibid: 330). After the revolution in 1950, Nepal became opened for outsiders and Christianity started to emerge again. “Many Nepali Christians who had been living in India took this opportunity to return to their home land. Christian missions were invited by the government to develop the country, especially in the field of education and medicine” (Ibid 2008: 330). The works of missionaries in the past were bounded not to develop religion. The same authors further inform about old Christian organization in Nepal, “The oldest ones in the country are the International Nepal fellowship (INF) based in Pokhara and United Mission to Nepal (UMN) based in Kathmandu. But these missions, keeping their agreement with the government not to be involved in “preaching and proselytizing” have taken no active role in the leadership of Nepali church” (Ibid 2008: 331). Before the revolution of 1990, conversion to Christianity and preaching were strictly prohibited. People used to go in India to get baptized. “At one time Nepalis wanting to become Christians would cross the border to India, get baptized there, and then return as Christians (which was allowed)” (Ibid 2008: 331).

There was a big revolution for democracy in 1990 in Nepal and after this revolution people got freedom to practice their religions. People started to read Bible and open church. Majupuria and Majupuria write this movement in the following ways, “Christians have been much encouraged. Those who were afraid before to go to church have now started going. Church activities have increased with Bible classes, Youth groups, Women’s groups, each having their own activities” (Ibid 2008: 332). In present days, Christianity is growing in Nepal and the census of 2011 informs that there are about 3, 75, 699 Christians in Nepal. But different Christian organizations and news claim that there more than a million Christians in Nepal. Famous newspaper, *The Guardian* writes, “More than a million people in Nepal identify as Christians, and the country has one of the fastest growing Christian populations in the world. (Pattison 2017 August 15). Though, it is difficult to find the exact numbers of Christians in Nepal still we can claim that Christians are increasing in significant numbers in Nepal. The ministry report, *Church in Nepal*, prepared by Reuben, Rai and 40 Nepali Christian pastors gives information about current Nepali Christians and numbers of Churches in the following ways:

The most comprehensive survey of Christians in Nepal was conducted by the Nepal Research and Resource Network. Begin in 2001 with the results published in 2007; the survey covered all seventy- five districts of the country. It showed a total of 2,799 churches, 274, 462 baptized members, 379,042 persons attending; this number equals about 1.5 percent of Nepal’s population. Today, 2016, we estimate, there are above 2 million Christians live in Nepal” (Rai et al. 2016July 27).

Now Christianity is flourishing in Nepal and various Christian organizations have been engaging in social works too. The society is becoming educated and multicultural and various marginal religious groups are making their own identity in the Nepalese society. After studying the current Nepalese society, Roof, W. C., & Juergensmeyer, M. explain, “Through an increase in international travel and migration alongside the growing movements of social and political reform of recent decades, Nepal’s religious traditions have begun to be shaped by global religious movements as Nepalis become increasingly involved in transnational religious networks”(Roof& Juergensmeyer2012: 882).

1.6 Hinduism in Nepal

Hinduism is the oldest religion of the world and it is started from more than 500 years ago. “History of the Hindus goes back to 5000 years. However Hindus believe that their religion has

no beginning or end. Hinduism is not the religion established by a single person but it is a growth of ideas, beliefs and rituals” (Majupuria and Majupuria 2008:45). According to the census of Nepal (2011), 81.3 percent of the Nepali population is Hindu. Hinduism is the popular religion in India, Sri Lanka and Indonesia too. “Hinduism is the oldest religion of the world. It is the faith practiced by the majority of the Nepalese, peoples of India and Bali (Indonesia) and millions of Indians who have migrated to other countries. Many ancient cultures as in Southeast Asia are greatly influenced by the ethos of the Hindu culture” (ibid: 45). The main teaching book of Hinduism is Vedas which teaches about the law and duty of human beings. “The main Hindu texts are the Vedas and their supplements (books based on the Vedas). Veda is a Sanskrit word meaning ‘knowledge’. These scriptures do not mention the word ‘Hindu’ but many scriptures discuss dharma, which can be rendered as ‘code of conduct’, ‘law’, or ‘duty’”(BBC News 2009-9-29). Nepali Hindus worship their gods Shiva, Vishnu and Brahma and also worship to nature like Sun, Moon, River, Fire etc. “Nepal’s Hindus are predominantly Shaivites and Netherland’s Shaktas, practicing rituals and rites similar to, but distinct from, those in contemporary India. For example, in Nepal, animal sacrifice is still a common practice, and major Hindu holidays such as Dashain - Dussera in India—are uniquely Nepali in practice and narrative” (Roof & Juergensmeyer2012: 883). Off course Nepal is a Hindu dominant country and most of the social rules are Hindu favorable. Before 2008, Nepal was only a Hindu kingdom in the world. “... in May 2008, Nepal was declared a federal constitutional republic, and Nepalis elected their first president in the newly secular state” (ibid: 882). “When Nepal was declared a secular state, many minor religious groups became happy and made celebration but vast majority of The Hindu were not happy at that time” (Rai et al. 2016July 27). “Still many Hindu organizations have been demanding to re- establish Hinduism in Nepal” (Roof & Juergensmeyer2012: 883).

1.7 Relation between Christian and Other religions.

The present research is about the ups and down of Christians in Nepal therefore, it is essential to notify the relation between Christian and other religions in this thesis. Popular religions in this Himalayan country are Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and Christianity. Most of the cases, religious tolerance is practiced here and they have mutual relationship among all religious groups. “Nepal’s contemporary religious landscape is highly diverse and regional and ethnic variations are found within each religious tradition” (Roof& Juergensmeyer2012: 882).

In the Nepalese society, we cannot find many visible conflicts between Christians and other religious groups even though; there is not equality in practical life. By seeing the outer core of the society we can say that there is harmonious relation among all religions but when we study deeply we can find that minor religions have been tolerating numerous discriminations and prejudices in the society. In the society, powerful religions are Hinduism and Buddhism and all the norms and traditions of the society are in their favors. To support my point I again want to quote the lines from Roof, W. C., & Juergensmeyer, M. “With the rise of Hindu nationalism in India and the weakening of Hindu royal power in Nepal, Hindu nationalist groups formed in Nepal in the 1990s and since then continue to agitate, sometimes violently, for a Hindu national identity and the suppression of religious freedoms for minorities” (Roof& Juergensmeyer2012: 883). After taking the interview of some respondents, I came to know that in Nepali societies; still in some places (not everywhere) Christianity is taken as a foreign and cow eaters’ religion. Conversion of religion is still taken as sinful act. When some person in the family converts from Hindu to Christian, he is noticed by everyone. Other members try to persuade him/ her not to change the religion. In this sense, we can say that there is religious secularism in the constitution but not still in practical life. In the constitutions of Nepal, religious conversion is restricted. “Although there is great tolerance in Nepal in matters of religion there are certain restrictions. Change of religion is not allowed by constitution of the kingdom of Nepal (1990)” (Majupuria and Majupuria 2008:337). Recently formed constitution of Nepal (2015) is also against the religious conversion. Scholars write such strict rule is applied only for Christians and other minor religions not for Hindus. “No doubt only Hindus can be easily tempted to do so” (Majupuria and Majupuria 2008:337). Off course, the society has been changing day by day and people are open- minded towards other’s religion but still in the country parts of Nepal some people hate conversion from Hinduism to Christianity.

1.8 Purpose and significant of the thesis

Though, Christianity was introduced in Nepal more than three hundred years ago, it is still in developing position. There are different factors which have been preventing to flourish Christianity in Nepal. Christianity in Nepal is always affected by political scenario of Nepal and geographical structure. Nepal is situated between India and China and there is open border to India. As India is Hindu majority country that is the reason in Nepal has also many Hindus.

“Regarding the religious beliefs, all important religious currents which stirred India also registered their light waves in Nepal” (Majupuria and Majupuria 2008:17). There are very limited numbers of articles written about the Christianity of Nepal and it is difficult to find the books about challenges they have been facing. In this sense, my thesis is a mile stone to know about the problems and struggles of Nepali Christians. This research informs about how the Christianity has been struggling since past to present. After my field study, I came to find that especially poor and low caste people have been attracting towards Christianity. Similar ideas were published in *The Guardian* “It is Dalits, and other marginalized groups, who are leading a surge in the growth of Christianity in Nepal. More than a million people in Nepal identify as Christians, and the country has one of the fastest growing Christian populations in the world. The Federation of National Christian Nepal says 65% of Christians are Dalits” (Pattison 2017 August 15). This research is successful to explore various social activities done by Christian organizations to win the hearts of common people and their struggles since past to present to establish their identity in Nepal. Reasons behind conversion in to Christianity, reactions after conversion, help from government sectors, reactions about churches and the social background of converted people have explored by the help of field study in this research. Various theoretical concepts like identity, religion and identity and religious conversion have been applied to analyze the interview data which is powerful part of this research. I hope this research is useful for the students, teachers, scholars, religious workers, missionary organizations and other national and international organizations to know the current condition of Christianity in Nepal. This thesis is useful, informative and interesting.

1.9 Religion as a tool to create identity

In *Encyclopedia of Identity*, Jackson, R.L. writes, “Religious identity describes how a person or group understands, experiences, shapes, and is shaped by the psychological, social, political, and devotional facets of religious belonging or affiliation” (Jackson 2010: 631). In this research study, I have researched about Nepali Christian society and their struggles and activities to create their own religious identity. Religion is a main focus of this research therefore without talking about religion and identity this thesis would have become incomplete. My targeted groups have been doing different activities such as; conducting Church related activities, singing religious songs about the glory of Jesus Christ, celebrating Christian festivals in collective, engaging in

social works, inspiring others to convert in to Christianity, listening the speech of senior pastors, spreading the messages of Jesus Christ and struggling for their existence. For them, preserving the Christianity and its value is preserving their distinct identity in Hindu dominant society. There is inter- relationship between culture and identity. In *Religion Identity and Change*, Coleman and Collins have connected religion and identity in such ways, “Religion has long been regarded by social scientists and psychologists as a key source of identity formation and maintenance, ranging from personal conversion experience to collective association with fellow believers” (Coleman and Collins 2004: 03). Off course religion is a key source of identity for the Nepali Christians too. These societies are minority in numbers therefore they have created their own Christian societies and help each other in the difficult situation. They have been reforming the societies by engaging in education, health sectors and social sectors. Renowned missionaries and Christian organizations like Himal Partner, United Mission to Nepal, International Nepal Fellow ship, Team Nepal and other different NGOs and INGOs have been contributing in the Nepalese society for the development of the country and to establish Christian identity in Nepal. Nepalese Christian societies are successful to win the hearts of poor and grass-root level citizens by taking part in the various social, political, economical and natural problems. In *Religious Conversion Movements in South Asia*, Geoffrey A. Oddie says, “The emergence of new forms of religious identity, involving different ways of understanding the individual, community and cosmic order have been closely linked with the development of new types of ethical and social behavior”(Oddie1997:01). Religion and identity are essential issue for the Nepalese Christians and they want to develop their own identity by using their religion therefore it is an important topic for this research.

1.10 Religious conversion in the context of Nepal

In *Encyclopedia of Global Religion*, Roof, W. C., & Juergensmeyer, M define, “Conversion is the process of an individual or a group changing religious allegiance from one faith or community to another or from no particular religious affiliation to one with an identifiable name and organization” (Roof & Juergensmeyer2012:251). Generally religious conversion refers to change of one religion to other. When we study about the Christianity of Nepal, it is essential to talk about conversion. Nepal is a Hindu dominant country and to stop the people converting into other religions, Constitution of Nepal (2015) speaks against religious conversion. Though it is

illegal to convert one religion to another religion, people have been changing their religion day by day in the Nepalese society. Lewis R. Rambo, “Conversion will mean simple change from the absence of a faith system to a faith commitment, from religious affiliation with one faith system to another, or from one orientation to another within a single faith system (Rambo1993:0 2). The trend of converting from Hinduism to Christianity is increasing in Nepal because of various reasons. Especially poor, helpless and lower caste people have been converting in to Christianity. Multiculturalism, globalization, true faiths on Christianity, inequality in the Hinduism and natural disasters are the significant motifs behind conversion in the context of Nepal. Conversion can be sudden and gradual. In *Invitation to the Psychology of Religion*, Raymond F. Paloutzian borrows the idea of Thouless (1971) and distinguishes among three kinds of conversion, intellectual, moral and social. He explains, “Intellectual conversions are the changes in the belief component of the religious attitude; moral conversions are changes in the motivation toward morally relevant behavior; social conversions are changes in one’s actions toward the social environment” (Paloutzian1996:165). In the context of Nepal also we can find various kinds of conversion as defined by Paloutzian. Conversion is a challenging task in the Nepalese society because converted person should tolerate lots of criticisms from the friends and relatives. Still in the traditional society, conversion is taken as sinful act. Here I want to quote an example from Jackson’s book which is suitable in the Nepalese society too. He informs that, “In India, Hindu nationalists claim that conversion to Islam or Christianity is equivalent to robbing the nation of its citizen” (Jackson2010: 254). As described by Jackson, In Nepalese society we can find individual and collective conversion. In Nepal Christian organizations have been doing different activities like distributing bibles in the public places, conducting mass healing programs, giving public speech by the pastors and helping in difficult situations. In the society Hindu leaders are against the conversion and they claim that only sinners and opportunists can quit the traditional religions and adopt the new religion. Definitely there are pros and cons of conversion and it has been continuing in the Nepalese society. Here, various motifs behind conversion, reactions of the society after conversion and challenges after conversion are the concerning topics in this research. To explore the aim of this research conversion is mandatory theory so I have applied it here to analyze the collected data.

1.11 Research Design and Organization of the Thesis

Research design is a holistic outline of the research. Here I have described about how the research data are collected, which method are applied and how do I analyze the data. “In fact, the research design is the conceptual structure within which research is conducted; it constitutes the blueprint for the collection, measurement and analysis of data” (Kothari 2004: 31). To explore the challenges faced by Nepali Christians, I have interviewed them and analyzed the data by the help of various primary and secondary resources. Field visits, taking interviews and data collection are examples of primary sources and relevant literary books, documents, magazines, journals and internet sources are examples of secondary sources which have helped me to create the thesis. Different articles which are connected on Christianity, Churches, Hinduism, religious conversion, history of Christianity in Nepal, identity etc. are always supporting sources for me to write this thesis.

I have organized this thesis in six chapters. The initial chapter is about the introduction of thesis. Here I have described about the research topics and brief introduction of Nepali Christians’ challenges. In this beginning chapter, I have also informed about research questions which are about the social problems faced by Christians in Nepalese societies, views of non Christians (Hindus) towards Christians and Christianity in Nepal and reasons behind conversions to Christianity and reactions of converted people after conversion. After this, I have informed about the brief background of Nepal. Here I have presented the geographical structure and introduction of Nepal. The next sub topic I talked is religions in Nepal which describes about various religions in Nepal. Another topic in the first chapter is Christians in Nepal. Here I have talked about the population of Nepali Christians and brief history of Nepali Christianity. The next step of talking is Hinduism and Hindus in Nepal. Furthermore, relation between Nepali Christians and other religious groups which are harmonious in the outer part but conflicts in inner part is also informed in the same chapter. The next interesting part shown in this chapter is the role of religion and how it is using to create identity and also the religious conversion in the context of Nepalese society. Finally, I have exposed the brief plan of whole thesis under the title ‘Research design and organization of the research and concluded this chapter with brief summary.

The second Chapter of this thesis is about the research methods. Different research methods and techniques are used to wage on field research are informed under this chapter. The importance of

interview in data collection and processes of field research are equipped in this chapter. It is a social ethnographical research therefore qualitative research method is suitable here. In this chapter, I have presented the significance of qualitative research method. After then, I talked about research population. How did I chose my twelve participants and about their backgrounds is described here. To conduct this interview, I have prepared 12 interview questions and all of them demand the descriptive answers. The other key features of this chapter are scope and limitation of this research and process of data collection and challenges that I have faced during the field research. My interview questions are open ended and flexible therefore I have applied semi- structured interview in this research. It is useful method in social science to understand the feelings and emotions of target people. Another significant part that I mentioned is reliability and validity of this research. This research is a true piece of writing which is free from manipulation and prejudices. I have described about the importance of validity and reliability in research. In the final part of chapter two, I talked about how this research is supporting to the ethical values of participants, writers, various organizations and other related sectors. Finally I have concluded this chapter with brief summary of whole chapter.

In the third chapter of this thesis, I have discussed about the conceptual theories which are significant to analyze the whole data interviews. How the religion is preserved to create the identity of particular groups is described here by the help of different scholars' definitions of Religion and identity. Different types of identities and their roles in the present society is depicted here with literature reviews. The next essential theory I have discussed in this chapter is religious conversion. Definitions of religious conversion, motifs behind conversion, types of conversions and reactions after conversions are presented here which are supportive to analyze the data in chapter four.

The fourth chapter of this thesis is data presentation and analysis. In this chapter I have analyzed the data that I received after interview in descriptive ways. This chapter is little longer because I have analyzed the whole field report and interview data by the help of conceptual theories, various literary sources which are related to my research and responses of my participants. Here have compared, contrasted and analyzed the data to find out the challenges faced by Nepalese Christians in the Nepalese society and also the views of Hindus towards Christianity and churches in Nepal.

The fifth chapter of this research is conclusion where I have presented the brief summary and extra information of the whole thesis and concluded the research with bibliographies in the chapter six.

Chapter 2: Research Method

2.1 Introduction

The selection of method in any research study depends on the subject matter, statement of the problems, research questions and aim of the study. “Research methods may be understood as all those methods/ techniques that are used for conduction of research” (Kothari 2004: 07). In this sense, various methods that I have used to conduct this research for instance, field visit, interview, data collection, preparation of questions, selection of the conceptual theories, categorization of the data and data analysis are the processes of methods. To clarify this definition, Kothari C.R further explains, “In other words, all those methods which are used by the researcher during the course of studying his research problem are termed as research methods” (Ibid 2004: 08). In this research I have used interview method to collect the data which is also a part of qualitative research method. To clarify the importance of interview in qualitative research method Kothari further explains, “The interview method of collecting data involves presentation of oral-verbal stimuli and reply in terms of oral-verbal responses. This method can be used through personal interviews and, if possible, through telephone interviews. (Ibid 2004: 93). By the help of interview and surface observation of Nepali Christian societies in Nepal, I have collected the data, tried to explore the religious and social problems they have been facing and find out the responses of Hindus towards Christianity. In this sense, my research writing is a kind of ethnographical writing which is possible by the help of interviews.

2.2 Why qualitative research method?

The present research is about the religious and social struggles of Nepali Christians that is why; I have chosen qualitative research method to analyze the data. I have collected data from direct field work, observation and semi structured questions. There are flexibilities in questioning and answering. Qualitative research method is suitable to analyze the social, political, cultural, religious and economic part of human beings."As identified with sociology, cultural anthropology and political science, among other disciplines, qualitative research has been seen to be naturalistic, ethnographic, and participatory"(Kirk and Miller 1986:09).

By the help of qualitative research method, I have tried to find the problems of Nepali Christian society and try to analyze the collected data by the help of different conceptual theories. Here I have focused the quality rather than quantity. As a feature of qualitative research method Bryman, Alan in *Social Research Methods* explains, “Qualitative research is a research strategy that usually emphasizes words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data” (Bryman 2008:366). Here, qualitative research method is applied to explore the challenges and problems faced by Nepalese Christian societies. For this, I have asked how and why questions so that my respondents replied their struggles in descriptive ways which is also a feature of qualitative research method. In the research, I have presented only characteristics and behaviors of target groups of the specific community. In modern days, qualitative research method is becoming more popular in social science field. To high light the significance of qualitative research method in social sciences, Catherine, Marshall and Gretchen B. Rossman explain, “Qualitative research methodologies have become increasingly important modes of inquiry for the social sciences and applied field such as education, regional planning, health science, social work, community development, and management” (Marshall and Rossman 2011: 01). In this research, I have gone in the deeper part of the Nepali Christian society and try to evaluate their lifestyles although, I am not a member of this group which is possible in qualitative research method. Through this research, I have explored the actual scenario of Nepali Christians since past to present. My research is open ended so that readers can understand the scenario and give their own ideas to solve the problems.

2.3 Research Population

Research population in this research means group of people who are participated in my field work. By the help of these people I have collected the data and generalized the result. My research study is broad and covers the big area. It is impossible to collect the data from every individual therefore I have done sampling method to select the population. There are two types of participants in my research and I have asked questions as per their religious background. I have total 12 participants among them 4 are Christians, who are born in Christian family, 4 participants are newly converted Christians whose parents are still non Christians and remaining 4 participants are from non Christian (Hindu) background. I have selected 4 non Christians as my participants because I thought it would be easy to understand the views of both parties,

Christians and Hindus. Moreover, this research's second task is to know the views of Hindus towards Christians and Christianity too. My participants are 18 to 60 years old and 7 are men and 5 are women and it took around 10 to 20 minutes to conduct the interview for everyone. All my participants are from the middle part of Nepal which place is called Chitwan district. I have chosen this place because I was grown up here and I have seen the various problems faced by Christians which inspired me to carry out this research too. In this research most of the respondents are educated because all can read and write Nepalese language. To make easy for my participants, I have asked interview questions in Nepali medium and later changed them into English language. Interviews were conducted both in orally and written form therefore in some cases I took on the short notes from the oral interview and later translated them in English language. Most of the interviews (with 10 respondents) were taken face to face but I have taken the help of telephone interview with two respondents. The time was taken almost same in both face to face and telephone interviews but in the interviews, I have not recorded any things. Apart from my 12 respondents, I took some ideas from a local person who works in the village development committee in the society. His ideas help me to understand the supports of Nepalese government towards Christians in Nepal.

Before starting interviews, I have taken the help of research consent and get permission from my participants. I also informed them about the significant of this interview. I informed to my participants that this research is only for my academic purpose and I will mention their identity anonymously. To hide their personnel identity, I have named them with respondent numbers 1 to 12 and I also informed them that all the data would be saved in a personnel laptop and it would be secret. After the completion of this research, all the data would be deleted.

2.4 Interview Questions

In qualitative research method the role of interview is significant. Before taking interview, researcher should prepare the list of questions which is a list of interview questions. My research study is based on intensive investigation of Nepalese Christian society so that I have gone to the field area of my participants and conducted one to one personnel interview. "Personal interview method requires a person known as the interviewer asking questions generally in a face-to-face contact to the other person or persons" (Kothari 2004: 93). In this field research, I have prepared the total twelve questions and most of the questions are starting from the words 'what' and

‘why’. I have prepared such variable questions so that my participants will give descriptive answers and I can understand their problems easily.

“The kinds of questions asked in qualitative interviewees are highly variable” (Bryman2008: 445). Here in this research, I have tried to make my questions clear and free from biasness and weakness. Asking questions to someone about their religious faith are sensitive tasks therefore I was conscious and supportive for their faiths and beliefs. By supporting the ethical values and religious faiths of my participants I have prepared below listed questions to ask my respondents.

A. Questions for the people who were born in Christian family:

- (i) What problems have you been facing in the society?
- (ii) What activities are you doing to win the hearts of the local people?
- (iii) Are you getting some kinds of ethical or moral supports from government sector, Medias or from international organizations?
- (iv) What kinds of differences do you find between 10 years ago and present time?

B. Questions for newly converted Christians:

- i) Why did you convert from Hindu to Christian?
- ii) What are the reactions are you getting from your family and friends?
- iii) What are the differences do you find between Christianity and Hinduism?
- iv) Why young people are attracting towards Christianity? Give your opinion.

C. Questions for non Christian participants:

- i) What is your response towards the newly built church in the community?
- ii) Why mainly poor and low caste people are converting to Christians?
- iii) Are you happy from the activities of Christian organizations?
- iv) How can we create mutual relationship among various religious groups in the society?

After conducting the interviews with my respondents, I have categorized the questions in to eight separate sections and analyzed them in chapter 5 with the help of Conceptual theories and extra literary sources.

2.5 Scope and limitation of the study

My research study mainly has focused to the Christianity and ups and down faced by Christians in Nepalese society and also the views of Hindus about Christian and Christianity. Off course, I have talked little bit about political and economical obstacles faced by Christians in Nepal but my core focus is on social and religious challenges. Christianity and various Christian organizations have been doing different contributions in the Nepalese community to win the hearts of common people. I have informed them shortly in this dissertation. To come in this present form, Christianity has passed long time span. Therefore, I have tried to study the history of Christianity in Nepal. To limit the scenario of my research I have chosen just a district (out of 75 districts) of Nepal which is near my home town which is called Chitwan district and chosen 12 participants from different backgrounds. After collecting data and researching from the participants of particular area and taking the help of national and international literary sources about Nepalese Christianity, I have come to the conclusion that there are several challenges faced by Christians in the research community. I hope that some of my findings might be relevant to other parts of Nepal.

Different primary and secondary data which are available in the schools, public libraries and also all the articles in the internet which are related my subject matter are helpful for to create this research. Being a citizen of Nepal, I have used my some personnel knowledge in some cases to analyze the data. In this study I have applied qualitative research method which helped me to understand the feeling, emotions and ideas of my participants. Structured and semi structured questions have helped me to describe my data in descriptive way. This research has tried to respect all the rules and regulations of public and private sectors and it is free from prejudices and plagiarisms.

2.6 Collection of the data and challenges

After preparing the list of questions, I have informed my participants about the purpose of this research and assured them to take part in interview. I have visited to them in their places in suitable time and tried to create warm environment. The warm greetings made familiar between us. When my participants were ready to take part in the interview, I started to ask some semi structured questions. In most of the cases I have collected the notes when they replied my

questions. My research is based on their religion and culture so I have tried to respect their personnel faiths and beliefs. I also tried to respect their feelings, emotions and sentiments in my field research. My participants' signs, gestures and expressions were useful materials for me to analyze the data which was done after interview. "Interviewing can be an extremely important source of data: it may allow one to generate information that it would be very difficult, if not possible, to obtain otherwise-both about events described and about perspectives and discursive strategies"(Hammersley and Atkinson 2007:102). The questions and answers of my interview were open ended which have made me easy to analyze them.

This field research is definitely a challenging task because of several sensitive issues. Here I have researched about Christianity in Nepal, challenges, their relation with other religious groups, reasons of conversion into Christianity, establishment of the Churches, caste system and their sources of financial income which are crucial and controversial issues. Beside these, there are some physical, technical and financial challenges I have faced while collecting data. In the beginning, people did not want to express their feelings and personnel answers. It took some assurance and persuasions. It is also difficult task to go inside the church and meet the authorized people. People did not express their personnel faiths and financial status. In some cases, people have expected some financial help from us because most of the members in Nepali church are from poor economic background. The next problem that I have faced is language problem. When I asked questions in English, they did not understand then I changed into Nepali language and conducted the interview. Most of the religious leaders are uneducated in Nepal. I have faced numerous physical and mental difficulties during the field visit. After collecting data, it is still difficult to analyze them because there are not sufficient academic materials related to my topic. Only limited articles are written about the Christianity of Nepal. Because of these distinguish difficulties I have attempted to write the thesis which is also a challenging task.

2.7 How the data are analyzed?

Data analysis is another significant step after interview in every research. It helps to evaluate and analyze the data in systematic ways. In this research I have analyzed the collected data by the help of research questions/answers and also the help of conceptual theories like identity, religion and religious conversion. In some cases, I have quoted the exact answers of my respondent. To clarify the quotes, I have mentioned some examples and illustrations from extra literary sources.

Various books, researches, articles and quotations from different writers are supportive materials for this research. I have tried to analyze all of their responses in systematic ways. Therefore, my data analysis chapter is little longer which is the gist of my field work. I have attempted to discover the challenges for Christianity in Nepal by the help of data analysis. Various ups and down of Christianity, struggles, achievements, conflicts, relationship with other religious groups, view of non Christians, role of government etc. are analyzed in descriptive way in chapter four.

2.8 Semi Structured Interview

The main characteristic of my research is semi structured interview. Though, I have already prepared some questions to ask my participants, I can also ask follow up questions to understand the actual problem of my respondents. Bryman, Alan defines semi structured questions as, “This is a term that covers a wide range of instances. It typically refers to a context in which the interviewer has a series of questions that are in the general form of an interview schedule but is able to vary the sequences of questions” (Bryman 2008: 196). In this research all the questions are open ended and also asked extra supplementary questions to the respondents in interview time. It is a flexible method and it made the researcher and informants easy to conduct interview. “There is a sense in which all interviews, like any other kind of social interaction, are structured by both researcher and informant” (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007:117). In this research study, semi structured interview has applied and respondents have expressed their views openly. Participants in Nepali society have expressed their problems and challenges freely to me and I used follow up questions to find out their problems more. They told that they were isolated by the Hindu dominant society and they were forced to create own Christian society. During the interview, I tried to study their emotions, feelings, signs, gestures and eyes. In some cases, my respondents felt difficulties to respond my questions at that time I asked the same questions in easy ways. We interact each- other in familiar ways so that they could express their problems and stories to me. Such practiced is possible only in semi structured interview.

2.9 Reliability and Validity of Research

According to Bryman, Alan “Reliability refers to the consistency of a measure of a concept” (Bryman 2008:149). He further presented that three prominent factors involved when considering whether a measure is reliable, they are stability, internal reliability and inter-

observer consistency. Bryman again defines validity as, “Validity refers to the issue of whether an indicator (or set of indicators) that is devised to gauge a concept really measures that concept” (ibid: 151). This researcher is careful that all the research works should be reliable and valid and has followed the rules and regulations of research. In this research, researcher has written what he has found in the research and not tried to manipulate the research. It is a truth report so that everyone can trust the research. Writing a research is a kind of contribution to the society because readers and scholars can know something new from the research. “Validity refers to the truth; the correctness and strength of the statement while reliability refers to the consistency and trustworthiness of research findings” (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009: 241-243). This present research study is about the current scenario of Nepalese Christian society and researcher has attempted to provide the data and findings accurately. It is based on valid data and other supportive sources. David Silverman has taken the ideas of Anssi Perakyla and defines validity as, “The validity of research concerns the interpretation of observations: whether or not the inferences that the researcher makes are supported by the data, and sensible in relation to earlier research” (Silverman2011: 365). Here researcher wants to clarify that the primary activities which are included in this research such as interview, chatting, telephone conversations etc. are reliable and valid. Beside these, various secondary sources like newspapers sources, books, articles, magazines, government documents, internet sources and already written researches have been credited truly.

2.10 Ethical consideration

Ethics are the rules and regulation of research. Research is important for the individual and society therefore researcher should follow the moral values. Hunter, David defines the significant of ethics in *European Textbook on Ethics in Research* in this ways, “ Ethical codes and guidelines are a means of establishing and articulating the values of a particular institution or society, and the obligations that it expects people engaged in certain practices to abide by” (Hunter 2010:18). In my research I have respected the faiths and beliefs of my respondents and other members in the society. Research consents were prepared before collecting interviews. I have followed the norms and values of religious leaders, churches, temples, Medias and different national and international organizations. It is a systematic writing which is free from stereotypes, prejudices and biasness. I have tried to be honest, confident and fair in this research. I have also

supported to the human rights and animal rights. Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD) has guided me to respect the privacy of individuals. I have acknowledged all the supporting literary writings and articles in this thesis. I also have credited the references, for example; names of writers, publications and dates of publication in the bibliography part of this thesis. I hope my writing is free from plagiarisms and prejudices.

2.11 Conclusion

In summing up, I have conducted this research to find out the religious challenges faced by present Nepali Christian society and also find out the views of Hindus towards Christianity. I have used field research, interview and data collection techniques to wage on my study. My research's aim is to explore the problems of specific society therefore I have taken the help of qualitative research method. This research intends to explore the characteristics of Nepali Christians and presents in descriptive ways. By the help of sampling method, I have chosen 12 participants from different walks of life. All my participants are adults and both male and females and both Christians and non Christians. After selecting the population I prepared interview questions. There are 12 interview questions and all expect descriptive answers from the participants. To narrow down the scope of this research I have chosen a particular part of Nepal which is in the centre of Nepal and took interview with limited population. This research only focuses the religious and social life of my participants. Off course it is a challenging task in culturally, economically, physically and psychologically. Consent letter, interview questions and field visits are essential parts in this research to collect data.

While taking interview I have used semi- structured interview. Here I have applied semi structured interview which was open ended and with follow up questions. The interviewer and interviewees were bounded by the scope and limitation of the research. Qualitative research method helped me to study the feeling and emotions of my participants. This research study is an academic writing therefore it is a reliable and valid piece of writing. I hope this thesis is a great contribution to the society and the nation. The ideas and views expressed in this research are authentic and free from manipulations. Being a researcher, I have followed all ethical and moral rules. I have informed the frame of this thesis to Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD) already. This study has respected the faiths and belief of respondents, religious workers, Medias and different organizations which are in Nepal, Norway and outside. I have done my best to

make it fair and impartial. I have honestly informed the names of writers and writings which are helpful to complete this thesis. This research is free from plagiarism and manipulation and it is a big contribution to the field of social science.

Chapter 3: Conceptual Tools Discussion

Academic concepts which are related to this thesis are presented in this chapter. Conceptual tools are also called theories which have played significant role in text and field studies. Cynthia Grant and Azadeh, Osanloo define the theoretical frame work in the following ways, “The theoretical framework is the foundation from which all knowledge is constructed (metaphorically and literally) for a research study. It serves as the structure and support for the rationale for the study, the problem statement, the purpose, the significance and the research questions” (Grant and Osanloo 2014: 12). From this definition, we can say that theoretical concept is connected to the whole framework of the research study. Therefore, in this chapter, I have discussed about various types of concepts which are connecting in this research study.

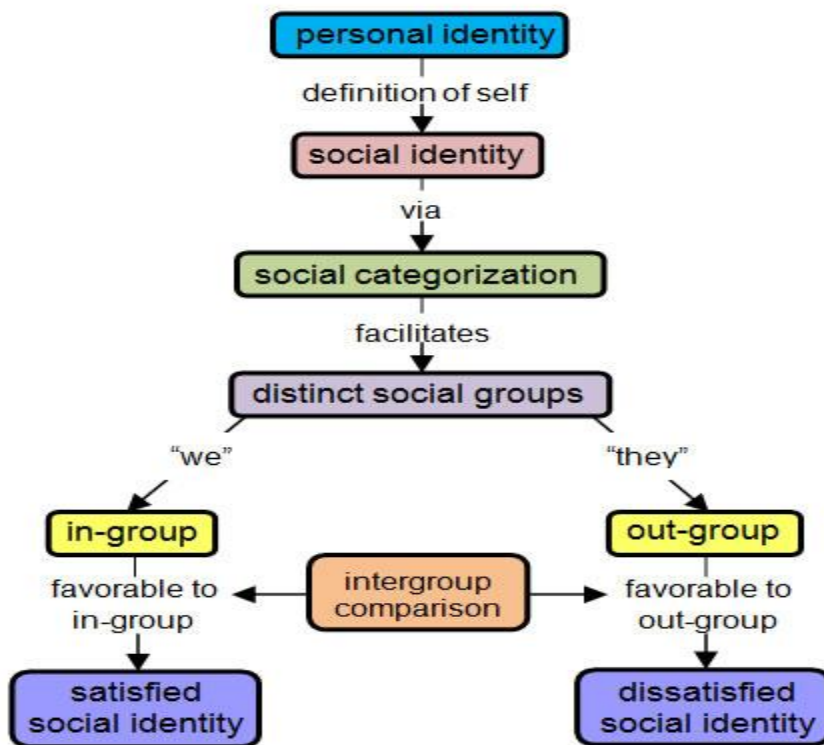
3.1 Identity

Identity is the characteristics and belief that distinguishes from individual to individual and it is designed by religion, culture, society, ethics, groups and politics. Though there are multiple phases of Identity, James D. Fearon, emphasizes the personnel and social aspects of identity in the following ways;

I argue that “identity” is presently used in two linked senses, which may be termed “social” and “personal.” In the former sense, an “identity” refers simply to a social category, a set of persons marked by a label and distinguished by rules deciding membership and (alleged) characteristic features or attributes. In the second sense of personal identity, an identity is some distinguishing characteristic (or characteristics) that a person takes a special pride in or views as socially consequential but more-or-less unchangeable(Fearon1999: 02 November 03).

The significance of identity in modern days is focusing topic in the field of social sciences. Different ethnic, social, political and religious groups have been struggling to create their identity. It is a changing process and time and place play significant role to create identity. In this modern society, different kinds of marginal groups are conscious for their personal and social identity. Here, personal identity belongs to individual and social identity belongs to the whole society. In *Encyclopedia of Identity*, Jackson Ronald L. borrowed the ideas of Henri Tajfel and explains the definition of personal and social identity in the following ways; “Personal identity refers to that which distinguishes a unique individual from other, equally unique, individuals; social identity is the internalization of shared, frequently stereotypical, identities, in this tradition

social identity is often seen as the more influential in the shaping of behaviors” (Jackson 2010:767). Study about a particular people or group in the society is a challenging task and various scholars have discovered different theories to study about individual and collective identities. By borrowing the ideas of Henry Tajfel and John Turner, Age of the sage has purposed a social identity theory to study the “Social Identification, the identity of an individual in the society and described, processes by which you or “another person or persons” identify with an in-group more overtly. The norms and attitudes of other members within that group being seen as compatible with your own or worthy of emulation by yourself, or as compatible with those of “another person or persons” or seen as being by open to emulation by “another person or persons”(Age of the sage, Undated). How the identity is created in the society is shown in the following diagram.



Source: Age of the sage (Undated)

After presenting the figure of personal and social identity, Age of the Sage further defined social categorization and social comparisons of identity. It explains, “Social categorization is the

process of deciding which group you or “another person or persons” belongs to. At its most basic and non-involved level “any group will do” and no necessity is seen for conflict between groups” (ibid). In the society, to create individual’s identity person categories himself/ herself in the different groups and starts to compare with others by comparing in-group members and out-groups member. “Social comparison is your own self-concept or the social concept of “another person or persons” becomes closely meshed in with perception of group membership. Self – esteem or the estimate of “another person or persons” is enhanced or detracted from by perceptions of how in-groups and out- groups are held to behave or are held to be able to perform or to rate in society” (ibid). Here through the above figure, Tajfel and Turner describe that some group in the society find satisfied identity inside their in- group and some people don’t find their satisfied identity and find themselves belong to out groups which is happened in every society.

The term ‘identity’ is a highlighting issue in the current society and the definitions of identity have been interpreting and analyzing since past to present in the field of social sciences. The traditional definitions of identities have been changing in modern days. In *Intercultural Communication* by Adrian Holliday et al. define, “The term ‘identity’ defies precise definition and cross traditional boundaries between disciplines in the social sciences, increasingly in recent years there has been an emphasis on the interrelationship of culture and identity, as well as on the longer established emphasis on interrelationship between culture and behavior “(Holliday et al. 2010: 92).

When we study about the nature of identity, most of the scholars have agreed to categorize it in to personal and social. In his book, *Social Identity*, Richard Jenkins has explained about the nature of identity in the following ways:

For sociological purposes identification can be defined minimally as the ways in which individuals and collectivities are distinguished in their social relations with other individuals and collectivities. Identity is a matter of knowing who’s who (without which we can’t know what’s what). It is the systematic establishment and signification, between individuals, between collectivities, and between individuals and collectivities, of relationships of similarity and difference (Jenkins 2004: 5).

Here, Richard Jenkins informs that identity should be meaningful and meaning comes after interaction. “Identifying ourselves or others is a matter of meaning, and meaning always involves

interaction: agreement and disagreement, convention and innovation, communication and negotiation” (ibid: 04).

In modern days, people are raising their voices for the formation of their identity in the society. Especially women, trans-genders, homosexuals, lesbians, gays, socially exploited people, minor religious groups, minor linguistic people and minor ethnic groups have been struggling to preserve their identity. Fearon borrows the ideas of Francis M. Deng (1995) and writes, “Identity is used in this book to describe the way individuals and groups define themselves and are defined by others on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, language, and culture”(Fearon1999: 04). When we try to find the definition of identity, we find it is vague and with multiple meanings. National identity, sexual identity, political identity, social identity and religious identity are mostly popular terms in the modern society. Fearon further explains about the various senses of identity, “This is the sense employed when we refer to “American,” “French,” “Muslim,” “father,” homosexual”, “ worker,” “professor,” or “citizen” as identities” (Ibid : 10-11). Being a researcher of religious and cultural studies, I have tried to limit my study by focusing only cultural and religious aspects of identity in this research. In the society some specific groups try to create their distinct identity by formatting same cultural and religious groups where they belong to. Karmela, Liebkind explains, “Cultural identity refers to the broad sense of cultural belongingness and shared values derived from group membership, a common history, tradition and language” (Liebkind1989:21). In modern societies, self and identity are essential and related topics and they represent the thoughts and feelings of an individual’s psychology.

Self and identity are crucial to making sense of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of individual, and this intrapersonal level is most often the province of psychologies...Self and identities are necessary to the study of group and intergroup processes and relations, which are of interest to all the social sciences(Ashmore and Jussim 1997: 12).

When we study about the society, we can find that all the members in the society are conscious for their “identity” and “self” and such things would help to understand their personal and social problems too. Ashmore and Jussim(1997) further explain, “Self and identities are not only central to basic social science, they are also important to understanding a wide variety of personal and social problems” (ibid:16). The significance of self and identity are crucial to understand the condition of human beings in the society. As a nature of human beings, they create their society by connecting with similar types of people and also they make various organizations to become strong in the society. Here, organizations help them to quest power and create identity. “Organizations are also

networks of identifications – individually and collectively – which influence strongly who does what within those procedures, and how” (Jenkins 2004:145). To create their own identity, socially marginalized people conduct different activities like making campaigns, movements and revolution. They raise their voices through Medias and express their demands with government. Therefore, religion can play vital role to change the society. “Religion may represent a profound revolution in the life of the individual. It may also motivate people toward social revolution – social revolution either in the sense of effecting change in some facet of society such as church function, health care, or race relation; or in the sense of changing the entire social structure” (Paloutzian1996: 03).

After the revolution for the equal rights, marginal groups will become successful to come in the Main stream of the society and government leading position, after then they feel that they have created their own identity. Jackson describes about the theorists of identification as, “It is likely that theorists of identification will continue to grapple with the relationship of individual agency and structure, with identification as a means of controlling subordinate groups and as resistance to definitions constructed by those in power, and with the process of identification as both intersectional and based in structure” (Jackson 2010: 354).

3.2 Religion and Identity

Religion is a common beliefs and faiths of particular groups. The most popular religions in the world are Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Judaism and Buddhism. It is a precious part of the society which helps the people to establish moral values. “Religion is in all cultures the most prized part of that social treasury. It serves society by providing from infancy onward the ideas, rituals, and sentiments that guide the life of every person within it” (Pals 2007:103). In the society, when a person likes the ideas and doctrines of particular religion, he/she starts to follow it. Daniel L. Pals further write, “People are religious, they say , because certain ideas strike them as true and valuable and therefore ought to be followed in the framing of their life” (Ibid : 12). All religions are created for the welfare of human beings and also support the human beings. In *The Oxford Handbook of Religious Conversion*, Rambo and Farhadian note the nature of religion in the following ways;

Most religions seek to transform human beings. Many religions also inspire human beings to form communities of support, worship, and service. Moreover, many religions advocate the centrality of transforming human beings so that they can be in relationship with the divine, whether the divine is conceived as a personal God or as in harmony with

the forces of the universe in a way that provides for human flourishing both individually and collectively (Rambo and Farhadian 2014: 16).

The next factor of people adopting religion is to be free from different kinds of natural calamities, stress, poverty, disasters and diseases. Generally people believe that their gods and goddesses will help them in difficult situations. In *American Psychological Association*, Pargament, Kenneth I. explains similar ideas,

Empirical studies of many groups dealing with major life stressors such as natural disaster, illness, loss of loved ones, divorce and serious mental illness show that religion and spirituality are generally helpful to people in coping, especially people with the fewest resources facing the most uncontrollable of problems (Pargament 2013, March 22).

In the society religion can create peace and unite the hearts. In this sense, religion is a kind of law which binds the people. True believers of religions start to love the human beings and other living creatures. In *Psychology and Religion: Eight Points of View* by Andrew R. Fuller explains that after getting the knowledge of religion, people leave their egos and start to love others, “They transcend the limits of their ego and merge with others. They see the human species as a single family and identify with it” (Fuller 1994: 150). Different scholars have linked the religion in various sectors. Pals describes the ideas of Sigmund Freud in such ways, “In his view, religion behavior always resembles mental illness; accordingly, the concepts most suited to explaining it are those that have been developed by psychoanalysis” (Pals 2007: 60). Here Freud relates the religion in to psychology and mental behaviors but Karl Marx relates the religion with society and economics. “Whether Christian or not, religion in Marx’s view is an ideology. Like the state, the arts, moral discourse, and certain other intellectual endeavors, it belongs to the super structure of the society, and it depends in a fundamental way on the economic base” (Ibid 2007: 134).

Religion and its faiths have rooted in the life of human beings in different levels. In *Invitation to the Psychology of Religion*, Raymond F. Paloutzian has defined the various levels of religion in the following ways, “Religious behavior has been defined at the individual, group, or social level. Religion has been conceived of as being either whatever fulfills religious functions for the person or group or a particular content or substance which the person or group expounds and to which they adhere” (Paloutzian 1996: 7). After presenting the definition of religion, in the next phase of his writing Paloutzian has divided the religion in to two parts, personal and social

religion. He defines the personal level of religion as, "Religion at the personal level refers to how it operates in the individual's life. It may supply the individual's life with meaning, create ecstatic states of consciousness, provide a code of conduct, make one feel guilty or free, or clarify the truth to be believed" (ibid: 8). Again same writer defines the social level of religion such ways, "At the social and societal levels, religion refers to specialized social groups (e.g., Melton's primary religious bodies), or religion as a social institution. This may refer to churches, synagogues, and other groups such as independent sects, together with their collective beliefs and practices" (ibid: 8).

The identity which is created by the help of religion is called religious identity. Religion and identity are closely connected topics. In the society people want to make their identity by adopting various religions. For example: a Christian tries to form his/ her identity by following the norms and tradition of Christianity and same case is found in other religions too. Religion has been a tool to create identity since past to present. "Religion has long been regarded by social scientists and psychologists as a key source of identity formation and maintenance, ranging from personal conversion experience to collective association with fellow believers" (Coleman and Collins 2004: 03). Religious identity is affected both by internal faith and external environment. It is shaped and reshaped according to the change of time and situation. "Religions are likely to vary greatly in the kind of identity they might encompass, not only because of factors 'internal' to the religion, but also as a result of influences pertaining to any given surrounding context" (Ibid 2004: 04). Regarding the complex nature of religion and identity Coleman and Collins further describe, "Both religion and identity are of interest because they are important to so many people, but this is not to say that their boundaries of jurisdiction and relevance can be seen as stable. Within both, constantly shifting forms of alliances and fragmentation, homogenization and heterogenisation, are discernible and need to be mapped out" (ibid: 14). In the society, a person learns religious knowledge from his/ her ancestors, society, school and social environment. After then, he/ she tries to search the value of 'self' and existence of his/ her religion in the society. Therefore we can say that the significance of identity is guided by community and social behavior. Perhaps Geoffrey A. Oddie is right here. He says, "The emergence of new forms of religious identity, involving different ways of understanding the individual, community and cosmic order have been closely linked with the development of new types of ethical and social behavior"(Oddie1997:01). But in *Encyclopedia of identity*, Jackson,

Ronald L. defines that religious identity is based on individual's religious, sociological, political and psychological background. He describes about religious identity in the following ways:

Religious identity describes how a person or group understands, experiences, shapes, and is shaped by the psychological, social, political, and devotional facets of religious belonging or affiliation. There has not yet emerged a unifying theory of religious identity, but the plurality contained within the category has occasioned psychological, sociological, and political, as well as philosophical, theological, and tradition-centered, accounts of religious identity(Jackson 2010: 631).

After describing the definitions of religious identity, Jackson categories functional or substantive approaches of religious identity which are beneficial to study the approaches of religion.

As objects of academic inquiry, religion and religious practices can be the subject of functional or substantive approaches. Scholars with a functional approach understand religion as performing a social, cultural, psychological, or political function. Those advocating substantive definitions of religion, on the other hand, investigate religion, including beliefs, rituals, and institutions, for the sake of understanding what constitutes religion (ibid:631).

In the society, people should get freedom to accept their interested religion and faiths. Such practice of religious freedom is called religious secularism. This is a modern concept and people can create their secular identity in the society. "The concept of secular identity was first developed in the mid- 19th century to describe a set of beliefs about freedom of religion for the individual in modern, national states" (ibid: 663). Off course the definition of secularization speaks in favor of religious freedom but in many countries in the world there is not religious freedom. The government and most of the social norms are in support of major religions. Therefore, minor religions and religious groups are always discriminated and suppressed and they try to seek their identity by uniting with same religious groups.

3.3 Conversion of Religion

Generally religious conversion is adopting a new religion and quitting the previous religion. After adopting a new religion, people want to create their own identity in new religion. According to Lewis R. Rambo, "Conversion will mean simple change from the absence of a faith system to a faith commitment, from religious affiliation with one faith system to another, or from one orientation to another within a single faith system (Rambo1993:0 2). Lewis R. Rambo further presents the reasons behind conversion in the following ways;

There is a hunger within every human being for the kind of meaningfulness associated with new life, new love, and new beginnings. Religious conversion offers that hope and provides that reality to millions of people. The precise contours of conversion will differ from person to person and from group to group, but the innate needs for explanation and renewal are universal, and the appeal of the possibility for transformation is pervasive (Rambo 1993:04).

After presenting the circumstances of religious conversion, Rambo further separates normative and descriptive approaches of conversion. He explains, “An important distinction needs to be made between the normative and the descriptive approaches to definitions of conversion.

According to the normative approach, a genuine conversion is formulated according to the theological convictions of a particular tradition” (ibid: 6). A converted person must be faithful to the religion because “in many conservative Christian tradition, conversion is defined as a confession of sin” (ibid: 6). Rambo again defines, “Descriptive approaches to conversion, on the other hand, seek to delineate the contours of the phenomenon, with little concern for what the ideology of the groups says is happening. The descriptive approach observes the nature of the process” (ibid: 06).

Rambo purposes four components are essential to understand conversion. They are cultural, social, personal and religious. About the importance of culture in human’s life, Rambo writes, “Anthropologists explore and delineate culture. They consider culture as a manifestation of human creativity and powerful force in the shaping and renewal of individuals, groups, and society” (ibid: 9). The next important component is society to understand the conversion.

“Sociologist examines the social and institutional aspects of traditions in which conversion takes place. They consider social conditions at the time of conversion, important relationships and institutions of potential converts, and characteristics and processes of the religious group to which people convert” (ibid: 9). The third significant factor behind conversion is Person’s feeling and behaviors. “Change in an individual’s thoughts, feelings, and actions are the domain of psychology” (ibid: 9). Finally Rambo explains about the importance of religion to study Conversion. He says, “Scholars of religion focus on transcendence, inquiring in to the religious expectations, experiences, and worldviews of converts” (ibid: 9).

In the same book, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, Rambo has borrowed the ideas of John Lofland and Norman Skonovd and explained about the six important motifs of conversion. They

are intellectual, mystical, experimental, affectional, revivalist and coercive. By taking the help of Rambo (1993), I have explained them in the below paragraphs;

1. Intellectual conversion: In intellectual conversion, according to Rambo, the person seeks knowledge about religious or spiritual issues via books, television, articles, lectures, and other media that do not involve significant social contact.
2. Mystical conversion: Mystical conversion is generally a sudden and traumatic burst of insight, induced by visions, voices, or other paranormal experiences. It comes suddenly in human's life.
3. Experimental conversion: Experimental conversion involves active exploration of religious options. It is the outcome of religious freedom in 21st century. In this conversion people want to experiment new religion and converts into it.
4. Affectional conversion: It is inspired by direct, personal experience of being loved, nurtured, and affirmed by a group and its leaders. When a person feels love and affection from some religious groups he/ she converts in to new religion.
5. Revivalism conversion: Individuals are emotionally aroused and promoted new beliefs and ideas and changes the religion.
6. Coercive conversion: According to Rambo it is a brain washing, coercive persuasion taught reform and forcefully converted one religion to another religion.

In fact, it is humans' nature to attract to the new thing. If people attract towards the new faith and religion, they start to find positive vibes in new religion. The change of faiths and attitude is also a conversion. "Conversion can be defined as the acquisition of faith. If faith is an attitude, then conversion is attitude change" (Paloutzian1996:165). Religious conversion is an important event in the life of human beings because it changes the whole life forever. Rambo and Farhadian have given some examples from the history about the role of conversion in the life of human beings in the following ways;

Conversion marked the life of each major figure in this period (Axial Age, c. 800-200B.C.E.) Mahavira left his Kshatriya Hindu family to start the Jain tradition; Shakyamuni Siddhartha Gautama, also raised in a Kshatriya Hindu family, became the enlightened one-the Buddha- and promoted the "Middle Way" while sending missionaries to teach the path to enlightenment. Confucius and Lao-tzu, according to

tradition, gained full insight and departed from their ordinary lives to promote their philosophies. King Ashoka , originally a Hindu was known for his cruelty until his conversion to Buddhism, after which he promoted nonviolence and the expansion of Buddhist virtues throughout his kingdom and beyond the Indian subcontinent in to other regions of Asia (Rambo and Farhadian 2014: 2-3).

Raymond F. Paloutzian again borrows the idea of Thouless (1971) and distinguishes among three kinds of conversion, intellectual, moral and social. He further explains, “Intellectual conversions are the changes in the belief component of the religious attitude; moral conversions are changes in the motivation toward morally relevant behavior; social conversions are changes in one’s actions toward the social environment” (ibid: 141). After describing about the 3 kinds of conversion, Paloutzian defines about sudden and gradual conversion. “The most dramatic of the conversion types is the sudden conversion. Here the conversion occurs all at once, in a short time frame” (ibid: 146). He again defines gradual conversion as, “Between the extremes of sudden conversion and lifelong religious socialization is gradual conversion. We can think of gradual conversion as a process of growth of belief over an intermediate period of time. The time span may extend from a few days to several months or year” ((ibid: 147). After converting one religion to another religion, people start to think that they are becoming more divine. They try to make relationship with same religious groups and try to create new identity. Rambo expresses the similar ideas here. “Religious people affirm that the purpose of conversion is to bring people into relationship with the divine and provide them a new sense of meaning and purpose” (Rambo1993:10). Off course conversion has both pros and cons. On the one hand converted people get opportunity to practice new religion; on the other hand they are forgetting their ancient root religion. Anyway it has been occurring in the society since past to present. Oddie, Geoffrey A. has borrowed the ideas of Rambo and presented the different types of experiences after conversion in his book *Religious Conversion Movements in South Asia* in the following ways;

Conversion is a process of religious change that takes place in a dynamic force field of people, events, ideologies, institutions, expectations, and orientations... (a) conversion is a process over time, not a single event; (b) conversion is a contextual and thereby influences and is influenced by a matrix of relationships, expectations, and situations; and (c) factors in the conversion process are multiple, interactive, and cumulative. There is no one cause of conversion, no one process, and no one simple consequences of that process (Oddie1997:03).

In the society when people are unsatisfied from their religion they prefer to change their faith which would make them happy and satisfied.

Religious conversion is a process of change from one religious faith to another. Generally, a person change their religious faith, because of the dissatisfaction of their religion, in terms of, meaning and purpose of their life and seeks an alternative religion which offers a new meaning life and new emerging hope and meaningful and purposeful life definition in another religious option (Dhakal2014: 66).

Conversion of the religion is a normal process in the society and it is a process of changing one religious faith to another. In *Encyclopedia of Global Religion*. Roof, W. C., & Juergensmeyer, M. define, "Conversion is the process of an individual or a group changing religious allegiance from one faith or community to another or from no particular religious affiliation to one with an identifiable name and organization" (Roof & Juergensmeyer 2012:251). To highlight the significance of conversion and its scope, they further inform that religious conversion is a popular theme in anthropology, sociology and psychology of religion for many decades and almost all social scientific research on conversion until the 1990s was based in Christian churches or in new religious movements. Religious conversion is a popular theme in all religions and all over the world. Influences of mass media, relatives and friends and globalization are factors behind conversion. "Religious conversion seems to thrive under the influence of the globalization process and media and technology help to flourish conversion" (ibid: 253). Roof, W. C., & Juergensmeyer, M describe five factors which are responsible behind conversion in such ways, "The conversion career approaches also distinguishes five main groups of factors; social factors: institutional factors, dealing with the religious organization; cultural factors, including political and economic factors; and contingency factors" (ibid: 253). Here social factors refer to social organizations and institutions which help to convert the people. Cultural factors mean cultural norms which inspire people to change their religion. Political factor is political situation of certain area which forces to convert the religion and economical factor means economical causes which motivates the people to change their religion. Here same writers further define contingency factors as, "Contingency factors involve random meetings with missionaries, acutely felt crises, stressful situations, and other contingencies that bring individuals into the orbit of religious organizations" (ibid: 253).

Yes, above cited factors are powering to convert the people one religion to another. When Roof, W. C., & Juergensmeyer, M inform about the factors behind conversion they explains that the conversion process is primarily influenced by significant others like relatives, friends, and acquaintances through the social net works that individual belongs to. The other reasons behind conversion are religious organization and networks. Roof, W. C., & Juergensmeyer, M again write, “It is clear from the literature that almost all people , men and women are recruited to religious organizations through their own social networks”(Roof & Juergensmeyer 2012:256). After studying about conversion we can say that conversion can be divided into individual and collective. If a person changes his/her religion, this is individual conversion but in some countries we can find mass conversion, in which large group of people convert one faith to another. In the society, one religious group tries to stop its member to convert in to another religion. Here I want to quote an example from Roof, W. C., & Juergensmeyer, M’s book. They inform that, “In India, Hindu nationalists claim that conversion to Islam or Christianity is equivalent to robbing the nation of its citizen” (ibid: 254). In the field of social science, conversion is a controversial topic and different scholars have been viewing it in different ways. Dennis, Washburn and A, Kevin Reinhart have linked conversion with identity in their book, *Converting Cultures; Religion, Ideology and Transformation of Modernity* and gives different view in such ways, “Conversion as an inscription of socially sanctioned markers of identity on the body challenges the view that conversion is a religious experience that may only be defined as a “reorientation of the soul”” (Washburn and Reinhart2001: xix). In this sense, conversion is a complex term and it is connected with negotiation. Washburn and Reinhart borrowed the ideas from Peter Van der Veer (2001) and explain: “Recent scholarship on conversion, however, challenges the logic of narratives, suggesting that conversion is not simply a unidirectional process of cultural influences and adaptation, but a more complex set of negotiations that may include both resistance to ideological domination and transformation of the converter as well as the converted” (ibid: xiii). After converting one religion to another religion people start to feel new experience and they star to compare their past to present. In *Conversion in the age of Pluralism*, Giuseppe, Giordan has studied the various experiences of converted people and writes, “The experience of believing often originates in or is accompanied by the experience of conversion, which is expressed in terms of radical change, a transformation that is almost always described in terms of a “before” and an “after”, to the point of leading to a kind of “re-birth” and

to the construction of a new identity” (Giordan2009:01). In fact converting one religion to another religion is a challenging task because it can be the issue of the society and family. People change their feeling, social status, beliefs, friends and identity after conversion. “Change in the personal biographic route and social and cultural change are very closely interwoven when we speak of conversion : values, speech, norms, behaviors, beliefs, lifestyles, relations, interests- everything becomes open to potential debate when the individual decides to “convert” (ibid:01).

In *Religious Conversion*, by Christopher Lamb and M. Darrol Bryant explain that Conversion can be understood differently in different religions and in different social contexts. In some countries conversion is illegal where as in some countries there is total freedom. They further explain, “What Christians call conversion or *metanoia* , Muslims would probably call ‘submission’ and Buddhists would speak of ‘ Going for Refuge’. In some countries (Egypt and some other Muslim countries, and until recently, Nepal) ‘conversion’ is forbidden by law, while in other societies we encounter ‘rice bowl’ conversions” (Lamb and Bryant 1999: 6-7). I think rice bowl conversion here means converted one religion to another religion only for little profit. Sometimes conversion can play vital role to join two religious communities. Regarding the nature of conversion Lamb and Bryant further describe;

Conversion is normally seen in a religious context. It is part of joining one or another religious community. It becomes linked to identity and membership in a community. But the language of conversion also appears in non-religious contexts. It has become a way of speaking of personal transformation and growth (ibid: 15).

When a person converts one religion to another religion he/ she has to cross the different stages of conversion. After taking the help of Rambo and Farhadian (2014). Lamb and Bryan (ibid: 23-24) inform and describe seven stages of conversions. They are context, crisis, quest, encounter, interaction, commitment and consequences. In the below paragraphs I have described all these seven stages briefly by borrowing the ideas of Lamb and Bryan.

1. Context: Context according to Lamb and Bryan (1999), is the overall environment in which change takes place. Contextual factors either facilitate or constrain change.
2. Crisis: The crisis stage is generally a rupture in the taken – for- granted world.
3. Quest: In the quest stage in which persons actively seek new ways of confronting their predicament.

4. Encounter: Encounter is the connection between questing person and advocate of new alternative.
5. Interaction: It is a communication between questing person and advocate. After then, persons change their thoughts, feelings and actions.
6. Commitment: In this phase persons decide to devote their life to a new faith or in new religion. Converted person does commitments to follow new religion.
7. Consequences: It involves cumulative effects of various experiences, actions and beliefs that either facilitate or hinder converting. It is a final outcome of entire conversion process.

Over all, conversion has been a significant issue in the field of social science since long time. It is a process of changing from one faith to another faith. There are multiple factors behind conversion. Conversion can be classified in to sudden and gradual conversion. Economic, social, political and psychological factors are playing powerful roles for the conversion and also previous definition of conversion is inadequate. In their masterpiece, *The Oxford Hand book of Religious Conversion*, Rambo and Farhadian explain;

Religious conversion comprises such monumental changes that previous ways of understanding the phenomenon seem inadequate. New ways of interpreting religious conversion are warranted because conversion encompasses religious, political, psychological, social and cultural domains. Contemporary studies of religious conversion that are informed by Western notions of human beings, derived in large part from Western interests and Christianity, have to be enriched to include a broader array of religiously, culturally, socially, and psychologically relevant insights(Rambo and Farhadian2014 :02).

As a nature of conversion, converted person changes personal and public routine and starts to follow the new practices and norms of new religion. This person feels free to stay with new religious people. This term is called ‘acculturation’. Rambo and Farhadian have borrowed the lines from Marc David Baer and explain;

Acculturation is depicted as cultural change, incorporation or integration into the customs, habits, and language of a conquering civilization. Converts change their daily private and public routines; learn another sacred tongue or adopt religious terms from other languages in to their language; dress differently; act and move according to a different choreography of ritual and prayer; consume certain food and drink and no longer consume others; and surround themselves with a new group of people as they separate from others, even family members, including spouses who do not follow the new piety of faith (ibid: 26).

Conversion is a popular theme in all religions, in all over the world. “Conversion occurs in all directions” (ibid: 1). Though, it is a very popular term in Christianity we can find conversion in Hinduism, Islam and Buddhism. Many scholars have found different experiences of conversion in different countries. Nepal’s religious conversion is connected with India’s religious conversion because both of them are Hindu dominant countries and missionaries first entered in Nepal through India. There are not sufficient literary works about the religious conversion in Nepal therefore I have studied some examples and experiences of different scholars about the religious conversion in India. Like Nepal, India is also a land of diverse religions. “The growth of a rich diversity of religious traditions within what we now call ‘Hinduism’, the spread of Buddhism, Jainism and ‘Sikhism’, as well as the spread of exotic religions such as Islam and Christianity, have all been to a considerable extent the result of some kind of conversion process” (Oddie1997 :1). “Christian missionary activity in India was linked to European colonization from the sixteenth to the early twentieth centuries” (Lamb and Bryant1999: 115). Like other Hindu dominant places, Hindu leaders in India were against religious conversion. “When Christian missionaries put forward their exclusivist claims, Indian religious and political leaders were at first bewildered, then outraged. The Hindu sensibility was deeply stirred when the missionaries began converting tribals” (ibid: 116). When we study the life of Gandhi, we can find that he is a strong follower of his religion but against conversion. “Gandhi believed that all people should be firmly rooted in their respective traditions, and then purify them if and where necessary. He was emphatically against proselytization” (ibid: 141). Like other societies, in the Indian societies too, we can find the tussles and conflicts among different religious groups. “The issue of conversion and reconversion, however, is a vital element in the situation... Hence; religious conversion is a major cause of conflict in the area.” (Rambo and Farhadian 2014: 439). When we study the Christianity of India we can find that in the northern part of India there are many Hindus converted into Christianity and many Hindus are unhappy for this conversion and there are tensions between Christian and Hindu religious groups. Roof, W. C., & Juergensmeyer, M. and present the scenario in such ways:

Baptist missionaries began proselytizing in the mountainous areas of northeast India, which developed the highest proportion of Christians to the general population of any region in India. At the turn of the 21st century, tensions between Hindus and Christian convert in tribal areas in the state of Orissa led to attacks on the Christian communities (Roof and Juergensmeyer 2012: 549).

When some groups of people in the society feel unsatisfied and exploited, they prefer to change the religion. In the Indian society too we can find similar example. “Hinduism tends to view “conversion” in purely spiritual term, but often in real life it may be a response to social and economic condition experienced by a disadvantaged group, as exemplified by the conversion of former untouchables or Dalits to Buddhism in significant numbers under the leadership of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar” (Rambo and Farhadian 2014:: 436). Religious conversion has positive impacts too because it broadens the people’s mind and they know about their rights. So many women in India have been getting education by the help of Christian organizations. Rambo and Farhadian have given an example of an Indian lady who had helped for the woman empowerment after conversion in such ways:

In the nineteenth century, a Brahmin Hindu woman, Pandita Ramabai(1858-1922), who was a brilliant poet , Sanskrit scholar, and activist, a polyglot who had memorized nearly twenty thousand Hindu sacred verses by the age of 12, travelled to Britain and the United States for education and converted to Christianity. Her conversion made her a pariah among some Indian intellectuals, but she was convinced that becoming a Christian should not entail a denial of Indian culture. Pandita Rambai declared that conversion to Christianity made her more cognizant of the inequality of women and the poor in Indian society, and she consequently worked tirelessly for women’s social reform, starting the Mukti Mission for destitute women and children irrespective of their backgrounds. Her book, *The High Caste Hindu Woman*, severely critiqued in equalities and injustices in Indian society. Pandita Rambai’s conversion hurt her reputation in India, yet years later she was touted by Evangelicals, Anglicans, Catholics, Indian nationalists, and feminists as a major inspiration (ibid: 2).

Nepal and India are both Hindu dominant countries and the experiences of religious Conversion and challenges faced by Christianity are found almost similar. Christopher Lamb and M. Darrol Bryant have studied about the reasons of conversions within Hinduism and explained in the following ways;

Although ‘conversion’ is not a burning issue within Hinduism, it does become an issue when Hindus come into contact with other religions. Hindus, especially the low caste Hindus, have converted to Christianity in order to shake off the stigma of their low status in the eyes of other Hindus. But these have usually come about by means of mass conversion of low caste members of a community in a small sub- region. Similarly low caste members have been converted to Islam and Buddhism. (Lamb and Bryant1999: 43).

Nepalese Christians are conscious to preserve their religious and social identity by developing and preserving their religion. Factors like, personal, social, economical, political, cultural etc.

are responsible for the religious conversion. Therefore, I have applied conceptual theories like identity, religious identity and religious conversion to analyze this research.

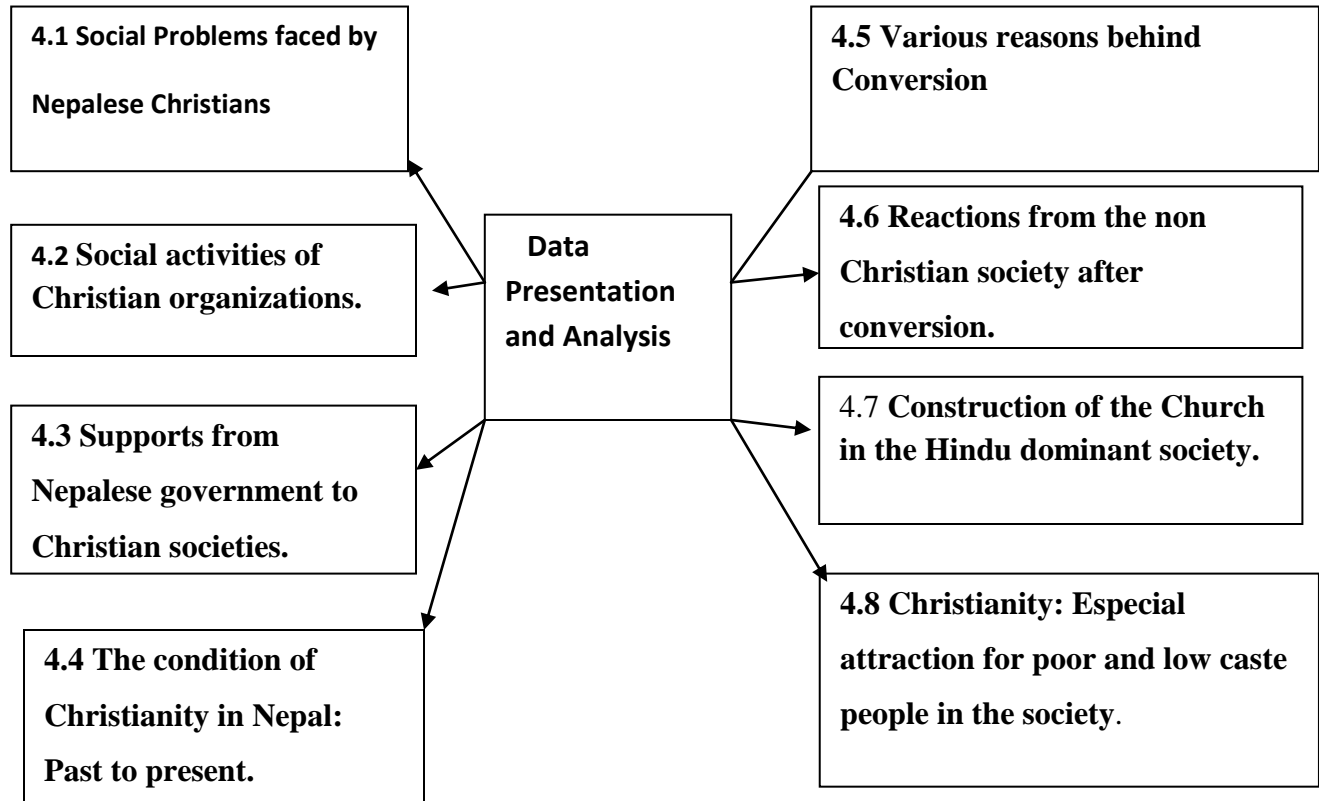
Chapter Four: Data Presentation and Analysis

This research study which tries to explore the social problems faced by Nepalese Christian society in Nepal and also the views of non Christians (Hindus) is conducted by the help of interview and data collection methods. After collecting data by the help of interviews, I have processed them by coding, editing and classifying for the analysis as described by Kothari C. R. “The data, after collection, has to be processed and analyzed in accordance with the outline laid down for the purpose at the time of developing the research plan...Technically speaking, processing implies editing, coding, classification and tabulation of collected data so that they are amenable to analysis” (Kothari2004: 44). In this chapter, I have compared, contrasted, analyzed and quoted the ideas of my participants’ by the help of other literary sources to understand the social problems faced by Nepali Christians, motifs behind conversion and Changes in Nepali Christianity since past to present. This is a descriptive and qualitative research. In the coming figure, I have presented the brief introduction of my participants.

Brief Introduction of my research participants

Respondent No.	Age	Gender	Education	Marital status	Religion
1	25	Male	High School	Un Married	Christianity
2	23	Male	High School	Un Married	Christianity
3	50	Male	Literate	Married	Christianity
4	22	Female	High school	Un Married	Hinduism
5	21	Female	High school	Un Married	Christianity
6	60	Male	Literate	Married	Hinduism
7	39	Male	High school	Married	Hinduism
8	25	Female	High school	Married	Christianity
9	40	Male	Masters	Married	Christianity
10	40	Female	Literate	Married	Christianity
11	28	Female	Bachelors	Married	Hinduism
12	18	Male	High school	Un Married	Christianity

The interview questions which I have used to conduct field research helped me to know the views of my respondents. I already informed that I had 12 interview questions and the intention of them is to explore the distinguish challenges faced by Nepalese Christians and Christianity in the Nepalese society. After coding the interview data, I have classified them into eight separate topics. In the initial phase of this chapter, I have discussed about the social problems faced by Nepalese Christians. Here all the social discriminations, prejudices, superstitions and stereotypes against Christianity and Christians are depicted with various examples and coding. The second topic of this chapter is social activities of Christian organizations. Various benevolent deeds of Christian organizations in the Nepalese communities are described here. I have also informed the names and short introduction of some social organizations which have been working in the society. How these organizations are becoming successful to win the hearts of local people is presented here by the help of interview coding and other secondary sources. The next significant part of this data analysis chapter is to explore the support of Nepalese government towards Christianity in Nepal. Here also I have coded the views of my respondents and also presented the various literary sources to find out the supportive acts of government towards Christianity. The fourths discussing part of this chapter is to analyze the condition of Christianity in Nepal since past to present. Various social and political struggles faced by Nepalese Christianity are described by the views of respondents and other literary sources. The fifth analyzing topic of this chapter is to highlight the various reasons behind conversion. Different motifs and circumstances which have been inspiring to Nepalese Christians are presented under this topic. After then I have discussed about the reactions of non Christian society (Hindus) towards conversion. For this I have taken the help of my Hindu respondents. Another significant topic of this chapter is to understand the views of non Christians and Christian members about construction of the church. Different types of reactions which have come after establishing a church in the centre of the community is discussed here. After discussing all these topics, in the final part of this chapter, I have analyzed about various reasons why poor and lower caste people have been attracting towards Christianity. To find out these, I have coded the answers of my respondent and examples from different books and magazines. To make clearer for the readers, I have shown all my eight topics in the following diagram:-



4.1 Social problems faced by Nepalese Christians.

Nepali society is totally influenced by Hinduism and there are various blind faiths, superstitions, stereotypes and discriminations in the society. Christians in Nepal are in marginal position and they have been struggling for their existence by tolerating different kinds of discriminations and obstacles. They are conscious to establish their social identity as described by Ashmore and Jussim, “Self and identities are necessary to the study of group and inter group processes and relations, which are of interest to all the social sciences” (Ashmore and Jussim 1997:12). To preserve their Christian identity, they have been protecting and developing their culture. In this sense, preserving the Christian culture is protecting their identity. In *Religion, Identity and Change*, Coleman and Collins have presented the ideas of Flanagan K. about Identity and culture in the following ways;

Increasingly, identity is the term that expresses the need to shape culture into some form of recognizable practice that links to an identifiable way of life. Cultural practice needs a distinctive mark for identification purposes. Identity and culture become matter of importance for those who find the links between each problematic and their bases insecure (Coleman and Collins 2004: viii).

When we try to apply identity theories to the Nepalese Christian societies we can find that they want to establish their both individual and social identity. As described by Jackson (2010) Nepalese Christians first make their private identity as an individual member of the society and later they have created the group which is for social identity. They have been struggling for their existence and against discriminations. Off course in the law book of Nepal there is religious freedom and all the religious groups are respected equally but in practical life powerful religious groups (Hindus and Buddhists) have been suppressing to minor religious groups. After studying the society of Nepal, Roof, W. C., & Juergensmeyer, have presented the present scenario of Nepal in their book, *Encyclopedia of Global Religion* such ways, “With the rise of Hindu nationalism in India and the weakening of Hindu royal power in Nepal, Hindu nationalist groups formed in Nepal in the 1990s and since then continue to agitate, sometimes violently, for a Hindu national identity and the suppression of religious freedoms for minorities”(Roof and Juergensmeyer 2012:882). When we examine the current Nepalese society we can find, uneducated and traditional people still believe in caste system and people are respected by their birth, not by their works. Still some Brahmins (higher caste people in the society) believe in Caste system and lower caste people which are also called untouchable are not permitted to go inside others homes and temples. In Ministry report, *Church in Nepal*, Rai, Reuben et al. write, “Though outlawed in 2001, caste discrimination is still widely practiced, particularly in rural Nepal, where people on the lower rungs suffer systematic abuse passed on between generations. Many converts come from these lower castes and missionaries point to Christianity as a way to escape” (Rai, Reuben et al. 2016 July 27). If we compare the condition of Christianity between the 20 years ago and now we can find the past was very terrible than present. In the past, if a person converted his/ her religion, he/she would be taken as sinner or violator of the social rules. Therefore it was difficult to become a Christian and live in the society in the past. Now the society is changing and people are becoming educated and open minded. In the city area, most of the people don't care for others religion but in the remote part of the country we can still find the same problems. In some places, Nepali Christians are still taken as cow eaters (because Hindu does not eat cow) and foreign religion followers. During my research I have found some examples which are against equality and various reasons behind conversions. One of my respondents, recently converted in to Christianity from Hinduism shared his experience in such ways, “In the beginning when I converted in to Christianity, my friends and relatives started

teasing me as a ‘sinner’ and ‘servant of foreigners’. They even stopped to invite me in their ceremonies like birthday, weddings and anniversaries party” (Respondent -1). Off course this example is a rare in the present society but existed still in some places of Nepal. In some parts of the society Christian are alienated and they are noticed, I mean known by all members in the society. In the village areas of Nepal almost everyone knows who is a member of a Christian society and also who is a member of a Hindu society. I already informed that religious conversion is banned by the Nepali constitution 2015.

It is common truth that a person cannot live without society. He/she expects help from other members of the society. If someone is neglected by the society, he/ she prefers to live in the place where he/ she gets love and help. Similarly, Christians are neglected and separated by the Hindu dominant society in Nepal so they have created their own society with same religious faiths. They feel that religious organization help them to create identity. Perhaps Jackson is right to describe the nature of identity. “Religious institutions are most often cited as the structures that play a role in religious identity formation. They provide narratives through which an individual can understand his or her identity” (Jackson 2010: 633).

In this section, I have discussed about the social problems faced by Nepalese Christians therefore, I have searched some online articles which describe about the social problems of Nepali Christians. World Watch Monitor shares the condition of Nepali Christian in such ways, “Many times in rural areas people might not attack the Christians, but they do socially boycott them; accepting Christianity is commonly known to be shameful for the family. A few months ago, Emmanuel Church in Dhadhing District (west of Kathmandu), was burnt by some jealous local villagers for the same reason” (World Watch Monitor 2016 august 18). This event informs us about the social condition of Nepali Christian which is pathetic. In some parts of the Nepali the society, if a person converts into Christianity, he/ she is does not get support from the family and society. Same magazine gives another example in the same blog in such ways:-

Students from rural areas often come to cities like Kathmandu to pursue higher studies; many times when these students are reached by evangelists, they accept Christ. However, when their families come to know of their conversion, they are denied financial help until they reject Christianity. Recently, we have come across two such students who had to leave their faith because of opposition from their family members” (Ibid).

After reading this news I asked to my respondents about similar experiences after conversion but none of them have expressed such experiences to me. This is an exceptional example of the society but it has been happening some places in Nepal. The act of conversion from Hinduism to Christianity is not easy in the Nepali societies, especially in the rural part of the country. Conversion is taken as a kind of challenge to the society and social norms. Here I want to quote the lines from Rambo and Farhadian “For most of the history, religious change has been a domain of partisan advocacy and either quick dismissal or harsh criticism by others, especially those who see their family , friends, or co- religionists jettison their religion of origin” (Rambo and Farhadian 2014: 4). The age of the sage (undated) borrows the ideas of Tajfel and Turner and inform that some people in the society feel in- group and some feel out -group. Here, Nepali Christians feel alienated by the main stream of the society as described by Tajfel and Turner, Nepalese Christians are categorize as out group and feel unsatisfied in the Hindu dominant society. Therefore they have created their own society; also my respondents inform that they feel happy and secure inside their Christian community. They celebrate their festivals and ceremonies within their society. After the field study, this researcher came to know that they prefer to make marriage relation within their community. For example, a Christian man prefers to marry with Christian women and Hindu girl prefers to marry with Hindu boy. Off course, there is cross cultural marriage too, but in very rare case. Not only in marriage ceremony but in birth, baptism and funeral ceremonies also, they invite only Christian members. There is deep binding only within Christians. They want to seek their own existence in the society and take part in various missionary programs and social and political movement. Jenkin explains about identity, “Identity is a matter of knowing who’s who. It is the systematic establishment and signification, between individuals, between collective, and between individual and collective, of relationship of similarity and differences” (Jenkins 2004: 5).

Another interesting thing I found during my research is normally people believe that people can earn lots of money and get opportunity to visit foreign countries by converting in to Christianity. Especially non Christian people blame Christians as a ‘gold digger. One of my respondents, a Christian, replied similar ways, “Actually I am faithful in the Christianity but many of my friends and villagers blame me that I was converted only to earn money”. He further said, “Most of the people think that foreign missionaries give lots of money for the Nepali church and people can be rich in short time, which is not true” (Respondent-2). Off course the society is changing

and people are becoming educated day by day. They are more open minded and liberal to Christians. But in the remote part of the country there are still some prejudices and biasness in the society. Christians are not allowed to enter the Hindu temple and Hindus' homes. One of the respondent who is almost 50 years old expressed his experiences from his past, "Now the condition of Christians is little better but some years ago Bhrahmins (High caste people) used to dominate the Dalits (low caste people) and even Dalits used to dominate the Christians, just imagine the condition of Christians in the society" (Respondent -3). This example shows that Christians were in the bottom level in the society in the past but the situation is changing and they have their own identity in the society, it is a nature of identity that which is change able. As I informed before, in this section, I have only focused the social problems faced by Christian societies in Nepal. Therefore I have tried to find the news about discrimination to Christians in Nepal and found that Christianity is taken as foreigners' religion and Christians and whites are still not allowed to enter in Pashupatinath, which is a famous Hindu temple in the capital city, Kathmandu. In *Asia news*, Dubey, Prakash presents similar experience of a tourist who came to visit the temple, "They won't allow us Whites to go inside saying that only Hindus can go inside," said James Cohen, a Jew from New York who converted to Hinduism. "I told the temple priests that I am a Hindu convert [. . .] Yet, they refused to let me go in the temple" (Dubey 2006 February 27). Same news paper presents another example of religious discrimination in the following ways, "Mary Julian, a young woman from Britain, said that she also wanted to visit the temple even though she was a Christian." "I was amazed to see so many people visiting this temple. So I thought to visit it too. [. . .] But when we tried to go inside we were told we would contaminate the Hindu god," she said (Ibid). After reading the news of *Asia news* I tried to find some official documents of that temple through internet, which inform that Only Hindus are allowed to go inside the temple but I could not find such verified documents, neither any of my respondents feel the same. But it is the common saying in the Nepali society that only Hindus are allowed to go inside Pashupati temple.

Nepali Christians have been facing various types of social problems. They are not getting equal opportunities in the society. All the social norms and rules of the societies are Hindu favorable. Most of the festivals and public holidays are Hindu favorable and they have to accept it. For example the cow is a holy animal only for Hindus but no one is allowed to eat the cow. Non Hindus are forced to respect the cow in Nepal. Government gives 15 days public holidays in

Vijaya Dashami (The greatest festival of Hindu) and 5 days public holidays in Tihar (second greatest festival of Hindu) but gives only a day public holiday in Christmas. In this sense, we can also say that still in some places of Nepal identity of Marginal religion is in crisis and it is negotiated and shaped. “The construction of religious identities is a dynamic process, in which a person is shaped by, and shapes, intersecting identities” (Jackson 2010: 633). In some parts of the Nepalese society, changing the religion is also taken as the challenge to the society. Converting into Christianity is taken as forgetting the culture and running after the money. One of my participants was from Hindu background, blamed in such ways, “Today many people are jumping in to the Christianity and forgetting their cultures and traditions. Actually, they are running after the money, which is invested by the foreigners, this is bad for the society” (Respondent- 4). Off course, Christians in Nepal has been tolerating various obstacles in the society but they have been using the norms of religion to make their identity as defined by Colemans and Collins (2004). These writers explain that religion has long been regarded by social scientists and psychologists as a key source of identity formation and maintenances, ranging from personal conversion experiences to collective association with fellow believers.

4.2 Social activities of Christian organizations.

“Religion is in all cultures the most prized part of that social treasury. It serves society by providing from infancy onward the ideas, rituals, and sentiments that guide the life of every person within it” (Pals 2007: 103). As other religions, Christianity has been contributing in the Nepali society. Various Christian’s organizations have been working in the field of education, development, health sectors, hydro power, gender equality and poverty reduction. By the help of various social activities Christians organizations are trying to win the hearts of local people and establish their own religious identity in the Nepalese society because “Organizations are also networks of identification – individually and collectively – which influence strongly who does what within those procedures , and how” (Jenkins 2004: 145). In this section, by the help of different literary and internet sources, I have analyzed the social activities of famous Christian based organizations which are currently working in Nepal.

(I) Himal Partner

Himal Partner is the Norwegian Mission Organization founded in 1938 and worked from beginning in Tibet (Himal Partner, 2018). It is one of the oldest Christian organizations working in Nepal. “Himal Partner is working for need of people therefore; Himal Partner is supporting Nepali community in health, education, business entrepreneurships, hydropower, and development” (Bashyal2015: 14).

This organization has established big hydro power project in Nepal and run different social activities. It is a Christian based organization and supported financially by Norwegian government. “Being a missionary organization, Himal Partner contributes to the development of local communities and help to build the capacity of local leaders and organizations with respecting local culture and customs” (Ibid: 14). “Himal Partner has been working in Nepal since the 1950s with the development of hydropower, industry, education and healthcare” (Himal Partner2018).

(II) United Mission to Nepal

United Mission to Nepal (UMN) is a Christian faith based mission organization established in 1954 (Bashyal2015: 15). In the name of Jesus Christ, it has worked to wipe out poverty from Nepal. The main mission of UMN is "to pursue peace and justice for all, to address the root cause of poverty and to make Christ known by words and life" (ibid: 15). UMN is an active member of International Nongovernmental organization. “Local and international working partners help UMN to work in health, peace, development, empowerment, educational sectors. UMN has given special emphasis on gender issues like; gender discrimination, empowerment, trafficking, trauma healing, domestic violence” (Ibid: 15-16). Famous hospitals run by United Mission to Nepal are United Mission Hospital Palpa, Lamjung community Hospital, Okhaldunga Hospital and HDCS- Team hospital Dadeldhura etc. They have built schools and hospitals in the various parts of Nepal. Majupuria and Majupuria inform the work of Christians in Nepal, “They work hard in the field of education by running two excellent schools St. Xavier’s for boys and later St. Mary’s for girls” (Majupuria and Majupuria 2008: 333).

III) International Nepal Fellowship (INF)

It is one of the longest serving Non government organizations in Nepal which is established in 1952. “INF helps people affected by leprosy, spinal cord injuries, and disability, facilitates development in some of Nepal’s most remote and poorest communities, runs medical outreach programmes and provides medical training as well as supporting and providing assistance for Nepali Migrants travelling to India and beyond in search of employment” (INF 2018). According to INF (2018) they have worked to help the people, who are the victims of flood by Disaster Response and Resilience project, Earth quake victims by Grace Project, Leprosy patients by Green Pastures Hospital and treat the deaf people under Ear centre project.

(IV) Team Nepal

According to Team Nepal (2018) it was first entered Nepal in 1968 to meet the medical needs of the people in the far west. Today, the members of TEAM Nepal continue to work with the Nepali government and the national church to improve the lives of Nepalese in health and education. It has been engaging in the social activities with the slogan “Go to Nation, be the body of Christ”.

Nepal is a developing country with many possibilities. Christian’s organizations have been trying to win the hearts of villagers by engaging in social works and different health and education related activities. They have been running child and women education programs in the society. They want to be the unique and best religious groups in the society. They are powering to Christian societies to stand by their own name. Christians in Nepal are few in numbers therefore they want to create their own distinct identification in the society. Jackson describes the definition of identification as, “Identification can be defined as a relational process rooted in group collectivities and social structures, by which one ascribes himself or herself to a social group, a social group attaches meaning to itself in ways that mark the group as distinctive, or meaning is assigned to an individual or social group from outside of the group” (Jackson 2010: 353).

Though there are different assumptions and factors behind the growth of Christians in Nepal the major is social contribution. “However, critics say that the conversion into and even adoption of Christianity is due to the fact that Christians are rendering great social and missionary service

which has presented a very bright picture of this religion to the people in Nepal”(Majupuria and Majupuria 2008: 323).

After presenting the short glances of major Christian organizations and their activities in Nepal, I am going to analyze the interview data by the help of my respondents’ answers about social activities run by Christian societies. To analyze the answers of my participants, I have also taken the help of some extra literary sources which are relevant for my research. In my interview, I have found that most of my respondents were positive and hopeful by the works of Christian organizations and missionaries in spite of some dissatisfaction. People in the society are happy to describe the social activities of Christian organizations. One of my respondents, who was 21 years old and recently completed secondary level education, was also newly converted in to Christianity expressed her feelings in such ways, “Well, I am satisfied with the Christian societies and their social works. We know the value of education and my church is providing me books and academic materials” (Responded- 5). She further added, “Christianity is better than Hinduism because here are equalities among all human beings and it also helping to abolish gambling and alcohol from the society” (ibid). Here, respondent number 5 was satisfied after converting in to Christianity. She also said that Christianity is better than Hinduism. According to the theory of conversion we can say that she was changed from darkness to lightness.

Christopher Lamb and M. Darrol Bryant explain, “Every major religion has its rituals for incoming members. In Christianity the ritual is baptism, and embedded within the ritual is the idea that the one to be baptized is moving from a world of sin, the flesh and the devil (definitely inferior) to the world of the kingdom of God (definitely superior)” (Lamb and Bryant 1999: 39).

Another reason of conversion according to English premier news, in 2015 there was a big earthquake in Nepal and many people were killed and huge numbers of people became homeless. After the earth quake, many Christian organizations went to Nepal for financial and mental support which acts became successful to win the hearts of Earthquake victims and common citizens. “Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (CAFOD) partnered with local masons for the Safer Home building project...Our humanitarian response includes supporting local partners to run training workshops with people from affected communities, so they can build safer homes that can withstand earthquakes” (Mbakwe24 April 2017). Moreover, my respondents inform that after conversion, people started to go to the church and listened the interesting stories of Christ;

gradually they began to apply the teachings of Bible. People started to love and help other human beings. They forget their personal egos and respect others as their family. We can find similar ideas in *Psychology and Religion: Eight Points of View* by Fuller, Andrew R. “They transcend the limits of their ego and merge with others. They see the human species as a single family and identify with it” (Fuller 1994: 150). This is the good outcome of Christianity in the psychological mind and social life of Nepali Christians.

The next rewarding work of Christian missionaries is to establish hospitals in the rural part of Nepal. About 50 years ago there were not enough hospitals in Nepal and people from my home town used to go to India for treatment. At that time establishment of United Mission Hospital in Palpa district (almost central part of Nepal) was the best gift for the Nepali citizens and still people trust to that hospital. One of my respondents, who is around 60 years old and traditional Hindu said, “Mission hospital in Palpa district can give better treatment than others. Foreign *Gora* (white) doctors give right medicines and fee is very low.... Thank you...United Mission to Nepal” (Respondents- 6). Most of my respondents were positive towards Christianity and their activities. Social activities run by Christian organizations are welcome by many of them. But one of my respondents, from Hinduism follower, expressed his ideas in different ways. “All these Christian organizations want to ruin our culture and tradition by implementing foreign religion. Externally they are pretending to do social works; internally they want to advertise Christianity” (Respondent- 7). He further explained, “Look! During the earth quake, they distributed Bibles, instead of foods and clothes and they did little support only to Christians and not for others” (Ibid). After studying the society, I found that some members in the community don’t want to accept the growth of Christianity. They blamed that people are attracting towards Christianity only to earn money and ruin the Hinduism. However, there are many true devotees of Christianity in the society. Many Christian organizations are contributing for education, health, gender equality, child rights, hydro power generation and public awareness programs. Every organizations have both pros and cons, similarly in Christian organizations are also not free from criticisms. Especially traditional Hindu priests and religious leaders think that emergence of Christianity is a threat to the Hinduism. Therefore, they have been conducting different movements and programs against Christianity. Hindu extremists even burnt and exploded the Churches in some places of Nepal. According to *‘The Kathmandu Post*, a daily national news paper of Nepal, “Police said that bombs planted at Jyoti Church in Damak-10 and Emmanuel

Church in Khajurgachi went off at around 11:30 last night. No human casualties have been reported in the incidents but the churches suffered damages in the blast” (2015 September 15). Same news paper further quotes, “Pamphlets of Hindu Morcha Nepal were found in all three explosion sites” (ibid). This is just an example, which shows about the hatred against Christianity by Hindu extremist groups. Such extremist people want to make pure Hindu Country to Nepal and they don’t want secularism. Same news paper further writes, “ The blasts in the Churches comes less than 24 hours after the Constitution Assembly retained Nepal as a Secular state rejecting an amendment proposal to declare Nepal as a Hindu nation” (Ibid).

In summing up, according to the views of my some respondents social works conducted by different Christian organizations have been appreciated by most of the People in Nepali societies. In the interview respondent number 5 was recently converted from Hinduism to Christianity and she expressed that later religion was better than former religion. She was getting some books and copies from the church. It means she was satisfied in Christian identity than Hindu identity. Respondent number 6 was a traditional Hindu but he was appreciating the good acts of Christian organizations. He informed that United Mission hospital was the gift for the whole human beings. However, respondent number 7 was against Christianity and he thought it was a threat to Hinduism.

In nutshell, after conducting interviews with my respondents it became clear that the investments by Christian organizations in Health sectors, education, hydropower, gender equality and various awareness programs have been playing vital role for the development of the nation. Except some Hindu extremist people, most of my respondents’ reactions about social works of Christian societies were appreciative. Day by day various Christian organizations are increasing in the society which is also a prize part of whole nation.

4.3 Supports from Nepalese government to Christian societies

In the constitution of Nepal (2015), it is written that, “Every person who has faith in religion shall have the freedom to profess, practice and protect his or her religion according to his or her conviction”. This means Nepalese government has provided equal opportunity to all religions. In this sense, Christianity is supported by the government like other religions. Nepal has religious pluralism and Christianity is growing in this multi- religious society. Gavin D’ Costa writes that

flourishing in pluralism is the characteristic of Christianity. “Christianity was born into a religiously pluralist world and throughout its history developed in that context” (Costa, 2009: 05). When we go back in the History of Christianity Nepal, we can find that they entered in Nepal only to engage in Social work. “The oldest ones in the country are the International Nepal fellowship (INF) based in Pokhara and United Mission to Nepal (UMN) based in Kathmandu. But these missions, keeping their agreement with the government not to be involved in “preaching and proselytizing” have taken no active role in the leadership of Nepali church” (Majupuria and Majupuria 2008: 331). But now the time has changed and Christianity has been mushrooming rapidly in the every corner of the nation in spite of ban in conversion. *South China Morning Post* writes, “Despite strict laws that ban religious conversion, Christianity has spread rapidly over the last two decades in Nepal, where many see it as an escape from the deeply entrenched caste system”(2017 December 23). Now significant numbers of Christian groups have been establishing in Nepal and they claim that there are more than 3 million Christians in whole Nepal. *South China Morning Post* further writes;

According to the 2011 government census, Christians make up less than 1.5 per cent of Nepal’s population of 29 million. But Christian groups estimate the number at more than 3 million. Locals said the census tended to classify people by the faith associated with their family name, meaning many converts were excluded (Ibid).

Off course, Nepali government is protecting to Christians and Christian organizations with social and political support but they are not sufficient. Local Christian leaders have been demanding their representatives in the parliament and other government sectors. During my field interview, I have asked questions about the support from Nepali government but most of my respondents were unaware and some were unsatisfied with government. One of my participants, from Christian background replied his dissatisfaction in such ways, “I am not satisfied with the government, and all that we have in the Church (he showed me the furniture and building) are from Missionaries and Christian organization, generous people from foreign lands donate us and we are running our church” (Respondent- 3). In this research, many of my Christian respondents were not satisfied with the government and government activities. They feel that they are neglected by the government. They compare themselves with Hindus and Buddhists and feel that they are behaved as inferior or outsiders. They think that their religious identity is not respected by the government and their identity is in crisis. Richard Jenkin writes, “...identification can be

defined minimally as the ways in which individuals and collectivities are distinguished in their social relations with other individuals and collectivities.” (Jenkins 2004: 5). The next of my respondents expressed her feelings with me in such ways, “The government has provided land and economic support to the Hindu’s temples and Buddhist’s monasteries but does not provide land and financial support to us” (Respondent -8). She further added, “Government gives long time public holidays for the other religious people but neglects to Christians” (ibid). During my research study I have found that recently formed Constitution of Nepal (2015) and strict rules for religious conversion is taken as the barrier for the Christianity by many Christian leaders. In the constitution of Nepal (2015) it is written that, “No one shall attempt to change or convert someone from one religion to another, or disturb/jeopardize the religion of others, and such acts/activities shall be punishable by law”. Christian leaders have felt that government has introduced strict rule for conversion which is against human’s freedom. One of my participants, a local pastor reacted similar ways, “The government is indirectly preventing citizens to convert in to Christianity, it is against religious freedom and human rights, we are unsatisfied from the government’s law” (Respondent -9). Most of my respondents who were from Christian background were unsatisfied from the government support to Christianity in Nepal but this does not mean that government is totally neglecting to minor religions. After listening the dissatisfaction of my Christian respondents, I went to talk about it with a local leader of the community, also a service worker in village development community, who was from Hindu background and we had informal talking. He explained to me that the government provides security for all religious groups equally and also provides land and economic support to all minor religions. He further explains, “First minor religious groups have to demand with the government by informing their population and their needs. After then, the government agencies would study about them and full- fill their needs” (a local person who has linked to the government organization). After interviewing with respondent number 3, 8 and 9 we can assume that Nepal government is not successful to fulfill the demands of Christians in the society. Respondent number 3 was demanding property and furniture for their local church, respondent number 8 wanted more public holidays in Christmas and Easter and respondent number 9 was an educated local pastor too, expressed his dissatisfaction about Nepal’s constitution (2015) which is against conversion. All of three respondents were from Christian background and they preferred to have their social identity because they did not express their personal demand but social. In the

informal interview of this section, a local government representative was interviewed and he informed that government respect equally to all religious groups. I think the government should persuade the Christian societies by respecting their demands and solve the misunderstanding if they have.

4.4 The condition of Christianity in Nepal: Past and Present.

When we go back the history of Christianity in Nepal, we can find that Christianity was started more than three hundred years back. In the ministry report, *Church in Nepal* which was prepared by Reuben, Rai and other 40 leaders, it is written that, “Capuchin fathers, from Vatican, arrived in Kathmandu on March 14, 1703 and stay until 1715. Father Tranquillius built a small Church in Wotu Tole in Kathmandu on March 24, 1760” (Rai et al.2016 July 27). At that time Christianity was a new religion in the Nepali society and some years later Shah King came in to the power and he banned the Christian activities and expelled Christians in to India. Same ministry report further explains, “They were expelled to India’s Bettiah when first Shah King, Prithvi Narayan conquer three kingdom of Kathmandu valley, all, Capuchin fathers and 57 local Newari Christian converts were driven out of Nepal, ending nearly half decades Christian presence in Nepal” (ibid). Similarly, Roof, W. C., & Juergensmeyer, M. (2012) have studied about the history of Nepalese minor religions and explain in their famous book, *Encyclopedia of Global Religion* in such ways,

Islamic and Christian traditions have also been present in Nepal since the late medieval period, the former arriving through trade routes and migration from Kashmir and the terai (the Gangetic lowland plains in the southern region of Nepal) and the latter through European missionaries. Religion in Nepal has historically been, and continues to be, highly local in orientation (Roof and Juergensmeyer2012:882).

When we study the history of Christianity in Nepal, we can find that Christianity was banned in Nepal for a long time and people used to practice Christian activities only from India and not from Nepal. After democratic revolution in 1950, Christianity entered in Nepal only for social activities. “Slowly, missionaries start to enter Nepal in 1950 but did not directly involve in preaching the gospel. They were focused on social services like, hospitals, education, and others” (Rai et al.2016 July 27). Christian organizations started to work in the health and started to win the hearts of local people. “Groups of Internationals Christian agency made United Mission to

Nepal and founded Saint Xavier School in Godawari, Patan Hospital and Tansen Hospital which provided grade one services to the people of Nepal” (ibid: 2016 July 27). In 2008, Nepal became officially secular state and Christians became so happy and the “population of Christians increased rapidly” (Pattison, 2017 August 15). Same ministry report further quotes, “It was after Nepal became democracy that many people accepted Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and savior. Christians in Nepal were overjoyed when Nepal was declared secular state in 2008” (Rai et al.2016 July 27). Off course Nepal is a secular state in present time and all the religions are free to practice. Christianity is a fifth most practiced religion in Nepal with 375,699 adherents, or 1.4% of the population according to the Nepali Census (2011). This information informs that the condition of Christians and Christianity has been flourishing in the Nepali society day by day. Christianity has come in this present identified stage by crossing different obstacles. Christianity has been found constructed and de constructed in the long span of time. In *Understand Religious Conversion*, Rambo argues, "Human beings continually engage in the process of world construction and reconstruction in order to generate meaning and purpose ...The notion of quest begins with the assumption that people seek to maximize meaning and purpose in life, to erase ignorance and to resolve inconsistency" (Rambo 1993: 56). In previous sections, I already talked that Christianity has been facing numerous challenges still in the Hindu dominant society. To find out the condition of Christianity since past to present, I have asked questions to my respondents. Here I am going to analyze the data which I received during interview period. Most of my candidates responded me that the condition of Christian is far better than the past. My respondent coding number 3 was around 50 years old and converted in to Christianity about 25 years ago, shared his stories in such ways:

Twenty five years ago I was in India and I was converted by the influences of my Indian friends. When I came to home in Nepal I was a single Christian in our community and every one used to accuse me as a sinner because changing religion was taken as sinful act in the Hinduism at that time. People in the community did not allow me to go inside their homes and temples...But now there are many Christians in the community and we have our own Church also. The time has changed a lot in the present days (Respondent-3).

“In the Nepalese societies most of the Christians are from Dalit family (lower cast) and poor economic back ground” (Pattison 2017 August 15). They believe that there is no caste system in the Christianity and they would be rich after praying to Jesus Christ. Now the societies are becoming multicultural and globalized therefore people are open minded. Also there are many Christians and they have their own society. One Christian goes to help other Christians in the

difficult situation and tries to understand the feelings and problems. “One engages in the process of identification from a very specific way of understanding self, other, social norms, and institutions, and the relationship of all of these” (Jackson 2010:354). Now they know about their own religious identity but, in the past Christians were helpless and alienated by the society. The Christian culture was strange for the Hindus. The next respondent shared her past stories to in the following ways:-

In the past no one in the society came in our home in the difficult situation and special ceremonies. Other Hindus used to think that converting in to Christianity was violating the social rules. We don't go in the Hindu temples and celebrate Hindu festivals, which seem strange for them... especial ceremonies in life like baptism, wedding, funeral ceremonies etc. are different than Hinduism therefore they think Christians are like outsiders or foreigners. Now the society is drastically changed and we have our own society. Other friends from our society come to help us in difficult situations and ceremonies. Now most of the Hindus take us normally to our activities (Respondent 10).

Members in the Nepali Christian societies in present days have achieved lots of rights and achievements in comparison to the past. Now they have their own society and own church. By borrowing the theory of Fearon we can say that Nepalese Christians have their own cultural identity. In *What is identity(As we now use the word)* Fearon borrows the ideas of Francis M. Deng (1995) and writes, “Identity is usedto describe the way individuals and groups define themselves and are defined by others on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, language, and culture”(Fearon1999: 04). In the past Nepalese Christians were jailed, banished and neglected by the government and society which I described in the previous part. They did not have economic and political support from the government and foreign organizations but now they have been getting different kinds of support from different sectors. They got funds to build church and run organizations from different European and American religious organizations. From my field study, I also found that they don't only rely on foreign donors, but all the members in the church also donate certain amount of their income to the Church. Now Nepali Churches are becoming independent. The ministry report, *Church in Nepal*, prepared by Reuben, Rai and 40 Nepali Christian leaders gives information about current Nepali Christians and numbers of Churches in the following ways:

The most comprehensive survey of Christians in Nepal was conducted by the Nepal Research and Resource Network. Begin in 2001 with the results published in 2007; the survey covered all seventy- five districts of the country. It showed a total of 2,799

churches, 274, 462 baptized members, 379,042 persons attending; this number equals about 1.5 percent of Nepal's population. Today, 2016, we estimate, there are above 2 million Christians live in Nepal (Rai et al. 2016 July 27).

The above presented ministry report explains that Christians are increasing significantly in the present Nepalese societies. In this section, I have interviewed with old members in the society because I wanted to know the condition of the Christianity in the past and compare that with present. Respondent number 3 was 50 years old and converted 25 years ago in India by the influences of his friends. 'Conversion occurs by the influences of friends and relatives' (Rambo and Farhadian 2014: 143) is applied to respondent number 3. He explained that he was isolated in the society because he was a single Christian member in the society and he compared his past with present and found huge difference. Now he has own society it means he has achieved his personal and social identity. "Although individuals may experience conversion in isolation, conversion typically occurs in congregations of some sort, often implying a change in a convert's identity" (ibid: 143). Similarly respondent number 10 expressed that in the past her family was helpless and no one used to come in her home in especial ceremonies and difficult situations. It was difficult to convince Christian culture to Hindu people in the society. Now time is changed and she has own societies and she informed that even Hindu members in the society also respect her. She feels that she has her own respected religious identity in the society. 'Identity of an individual is not stable' (Coleman and Collins 2004: 14), which applies to my respondents too.

Overall, after evaluating the interviews of my participants and analyzing different magazines, books, and articles about Nepalese Christianity we can come to conclusion that Nepalese Christians and Christianity have faced different kinds of political, economical and social challenges in the past and now their condition is improving day by day which is a bright part of Nepalese Christianity.

4.5 Various reasons behind conversion

In *Understanding Religious Conversion*, Rambo defines, "Conversion is a complex, multifaceted process involving personal, cultural, social and religious dimensions" (Rambo 1993: 165). Of course when we analyze the current Nepalese society we can find there are various personal and social motifs behind conversion. After studying the current Nepalese society we can find that

there are various reasons behind conversion. The significant reason is true faith towards Christianity and there are other reasons too. Inequality in the society, poverty, natural calamities, inspiration from the good works of Christian societies, and multiculturalism are inspiring the people to change their religion. Yes, Christians are minority religious groups in the society but they want to establish their own identity in the community. As described by Fearon, "... "identity" refers simply to a social category, a set of persons marked by a label and distinguished by rules deciding membership and (alleged) characteristic features or attributes" (Fearon 1999: 02 November 03). Therefore, these Christian societies want to increase their members and motivate others to come in to Christian society. To win the hearts of local people they have been doing various social works on the one hand on the other hand they have been distributing Bibles and religious pamphlets in the street and public places. After taking the interviews of my respondents I came to know that most of the respondents have converted in to Christianity because of their true faith but some respondents responded different answers which were linked to poverty, caste system in the society, natural disasters etc. Regarding the reasons behind conversion, the famous news paper *The Guardian* writes, "The growth of Christianity is driven by motivations that appear to have more to do with health, discrimination and poverty than pure belief. And behind the conversions, critics say, is the presence of well-funded foreign missionaries" (Pattison 2017 August 15). Though there are different reasons behind conversion, one participant who was about 50 years old and converted long years ago shared his story in such ways;

I was converted long years ago because of the true faiths in the Christianity. When I was in foreign land for my works, some of my friends suggested me about the Christ and his miracles..... after then, I went to the Church with my friends and pray together....surprisingly I found more happiness in my life and even got promotion in the job after some months. After then, I am a true devotee of Jesus Christ. After a year of conversion I came to Nepal and inspired my family to convert in to Christianity..... Now we are one of the oldest Christian in the society (Respondent- 3).

When I try to analyze the views of respondent- 3, I found that he was converted in to Christianity by the suggestions of his friends and according to Rambo's term we can say that he was inspired by social component of conversion. Rambo explains:

Sociologists examine the social and institutional aspects of traditions in which conversion takes place. They consider social conditions at the time of conversion, important relationships and institutions of potential converts, and characteristics and

processes of the religious group to which people convert. Sociologists focus also on the interaction between individuals and the environment matrix, and on the relationship between individuals and the expectations of the group in which they are involved (Rambo 1993:9).

Many people in the society have true faith in the society because in the interview they informed me that only Christ is their Lord and he could help them in the difficult situation. Christian's members in the society are ready to donate their certain amount of money for the church and religious works. They attend regularly in the church and organize mass healing programs and other social activities. Such true believers are converted only for their faiths and religious identity. Everyone has stories behind conversion as explain by Rambo and Farhadian , "Each person has distinctive concerns that they address in their journey of religious change"(Rambo and Farhadian 2014: 14). Similarly, in the Nepalese society there are different people who have converted because of different reasons. People have been converting in to Christianity to be free from the social crisis and inequality. As Rambo explained "Some form of crisis usually precedes conversionThe crisis may be religious, political, psychological or cultural" (Rambo 1993: 44). The next respondent, who was converted in to Christianity recently gave different reason in given ways;

I was born in the *dalit* (so called lower caste in the Hindu society) family and upper caste people in the society behaved me as an untouchable. They don't allow me to enter inside their homes and they don't drink the water that I touch.Yes, we all human beings are equal and we have same feelings and same colored blood inside the body but society made me untouchable. Therefore, to be free from discriminations I converted into Christianity.... There is not any caste system in the Christian society (Respondent -12).

Here respondent number 12 was converted into Christianity because of inequality in the society. He was behaved as outsiders by the Hindu society and he was forced to change his religion. His personal identity was in crisis so he changed his religion to make new identity. "On personal level a crisis may be triggered by people (an evangelist, family members) or events (an illness, mystical experience" (Lamb and Bryant1999: 25). After converting in to Christianity people found that they are equal in the society like other members in the society. They are co- operative to each-other and they find some kind of happiness within their society. " Converts usually converts because they believe their new religion is true, that was ordained by God , or hat it was a gift from God (or equivalent language used in various religions)" (Rambo and Farhadian 2014:

13). The next reasons behind conversion are that people think that they would be free from the natural disasters and various kinds of illnesses. Here I am going to describe a story of my respondent's friend. Of course it is not from my participant but I think it is useful to inform here. In the research, my respondent number – 9 explained me the story of his friend about the reason of converting into Christianity. He was ill from unknown disease, he spent lots of money for his treatment but he did not get recover. Finally he converted in to Christianity and miraculously recovered. In this sense, stresses and problems come in the life inspires the people to change religion. Pargament Kenneth I. explains similar ideas in his study, “.....major life stressors such as natural disaster, illness, loss of loved ones, divorce and serious mental illness show that religion and spirituality are generally helpful to people in coping, especially people with the fewest resources facing the most uncontrollable of problems” (Pargament 2013, March 22). After natural disasters like floods and earthquake people becomes hopeless and pessimistic at that time they find relief and satisfied after converting into Christianity. “In 2015 there was a huge earthquake in Nepal and thousands of people died and many became homeless. After the earth quake different missionaries and Christian organizations helped the helpless people economically and physically” (Mbakwe, 2017 April 24). True believers of Christianity think that Jesus Christ can help them from the sorrows of their lives. According to Rambo crisis is a catalyst for change, when people have some crisis they look for the change. “Crisis provides an opportunity for an option. Crisis force individuals and groups to confront their limitations and can stimulate a quest to resolve conflict, fill a void, adjust to new circumstances, or find avenues of transformation”(Rambo 1993: 166). Here in Nepalese societies too there are many examples that social, individual and natural crisis inspiring the people for conversion. During the research I found one woman she told me that she had two miscarries before and after converting in to Christianity she got 2 healthy sons. Here I want to share her life stories;

Well! After two years of our marriage, I and my husband wanted to have a baby but it was miscarried and we became so sad. After a year, I became pregnant again. We were optimistic at the second time but it was miscarried again. I was so disappointed and hope less. One day one of my neighbors came at my home and suggested us to convert in to Christianity. We converted in to Christianity 5 years ago and now I have 2 healthy sons one is 4 years old and other is 2 years old..... both of my sons are blessings of Christ to us (Respondent -10).

Here in the case of respondent number 10 she changed her religion because of her personal reason and by the suggestion of her neighbor. Both personal and social motifs of conversion are

applied to her conversion. Rambo and Farhadian explain about conversion in individual level in such ways;

On the individual (micro) level, it is not only social relationships that are important in conversion and the spread of religions, but motivations of individuals are increasingly affecting the conversions that have been taking place around the world. That is, individuals increasingly make decisions regarding education, work, marriage, location, and the election of leaders (Rambo and Farhadian 2014: 177).

Overall, after studying the society, we can find different types of examples behind the conversion. Some people are inspired by their friends and converted into Christianity. Some others are converted for better opportunity and solution of their problem. "Human beings actively seek solutions to their problems and strive to find meaning, purpose, and transcendence. Questing for something more or something better than one's present situation seems to be endemic in human beings" (Rambo 1993: 166). Generally in the society people think that foreign missionaries investment huge amount of money for the church and Christianity therefore people can earn money from the Church. Especially non Christians blame the Christians that people are converting only for money and not for true faiths. During my field research I found some of the Hindu respondent answered that people have been changing their religion only for money and to get opportunity to visit foreign countries but Christian believers don't want to accept this blame. They say that they have converted into Christianity because of their true faith on Christ and they feel more happiness and satisfied after conversion as described by Dhakal in his dissertation.

Unlike non-converts, converted people to Christianity seems more confident and highly positive in regards their conversion decision and Christianity as well. They compare their life, as life was in a difficult situation in trouble world and after conversion they perceived their life as a rebirth in a heavenly world with happiness and systematic life (Dhakal 2014:66).

Though most of the respondents expressed their positive feelings after conversion there are some respondents who felt little distress in their beginning phase after conversion. The family and society, which were Hindu favorable, did not digest them in the initial phase but later they accepted it according to my participants.

4.6 Reactions from the non Christian society after conversion

How did the non Christian members in the society reacted to Christians after conversion are described under this topic. When a person converts one religion to another religion, he/she would get lots of reactions from the society. Giordan explains about the consequences of conversion in such ways, “Change in the personal biographic route and social and cultural change are very closely interwoven when we speak of conversion: values, speech, norms, behaviors, beliefs, lifestyles, relations, interests- everything becomes open to potential debate when the individual decides to “convert” (Giordan2009: 01). Definitely in Nepalese society too converted peoples’ personal identities have become the talking issues of the town. Actually the aim of this thesis is not only to depict the problems of Christians in the Nepalese society but to present the views of non Christians towards the Christians also. Therefore in this section 4 out of 12 of my respondents were from Hindu background and I have tried to analyze the reactions of them about Christian and Christianity in the Nepalese society. As we already discussed that most of the cases, traditional Hindu members and Hindu religious leaders were against the conversation. They think that entering the new religion in the society means challenging their established religion. But in the society, there are different kinds of people and all of them have different opinions. Here, I have presented the view of a respondent who was positive about the rise of Christianity in the Nepalese society. She was an educated woman in the society and presented her ideas in the following ways:

Off course, I accept the rise of Christians and Christianity in our society because it is a 21st century and society is multicultural. All the religions are equal and people should get religious freedom. Umm.....Moreover, we should learn the good lessons from the Christianity and apply in Hinduism..... I hate the caste system and unnecessary traditions of Hinduism and I want equality in all human beings (Respondent 11).

After listening the response of respondent 11, it is easy to say that there are some members in the Hindu society who want equal existence of all religions in the society. They think all the religions should be behaved equal and all the citizens must have religious freedom. But there are some traditional religious people and some Hindu extremist groups in the society they don’t want the existence of Christianity in Nepal. “ Hindu nationalist groups formed in Nepal in the 1990s and since then continue to agitate, sometimes violently, for a Hindu national identity and the suppression of religious freedoms for minorities” (Roof & Juergensmeyer 2012: 883).These people think that Christianity is the religion of westerners and they have invested huge money to

spread Christianity in Nepal. According to such extremist people, Christian organizations want to ruin the Hinduism by converting the poor and uneducated Nepalese in to Christianity. Here I want to quote the similar views of my participant in the below paragraph.

Umm I don't want the presence of Christianity in our society. It is a religion of westerners which is vast different than our religion. You know..... Westerners want to spread their religion in the name of social works. They want to divide us in the name of religion and culture which is bad for our country. Even our politicians got big money from the Christian organizations and made our country a secular state which is not good. Foreign organizations have been investing money in the names of Missionaries, NGOs and INGOs. We should be careful about it and unite within Hinduism (Respondent -6).

In the interview, 2 out of 4 respondents from Hindu background informed that Nepal has more than 80 percent Hindus therefore it should be named as Hindu state and secularism is not necessary for Nepal. In *Encyclopedia of global Religion*, Roof and Juergensmeyer describe the political scenario of Nepal in such ways:

Following a 10-year Maoist insurgency and decades of off and on protests and grassroots movements for democracy by political parties and marginalized ethnic and religious groups, in May 2008, Nepal was declared a federal constitutional republic, and Nepalese elected their first president in the newly secular state (Roof and Juergensmeyer2012: 882).

In the Constitution of Nepal (2015), Nepal is described as a secular state which means it is not bounded by any religious rules and all the religions are treated equal. But some Hindus are not happy with the secular state and they have been demanding re- establishment of the Hindu state. "In Nepal some of the Hindus are against the secularism and they want to restore Hindu state in Nepal" (Roof and Juergensmeyer2012: 882). They explained that Nepal should be a Hindu state with religious freedom like before declaring secular state. In the society Hindu dominant people become furious with the converted people and organizations, which are helping for conversion. Here I want to quote an example of an Indian society which is similar like Nepal. This example is quoted by Ronald L. Jackson in his book *Encyclopedia of Identity* in such ways, "In India, Hindu nationalists claim that conversion to Islam or Christianity is equivalent to robbing the nation of its citizen" (Jackson2010: 254).

In this research, I have interviewed with 4 Hindus out of 12 respondents and among 4 Hindus, 2 (respondent number 6 and 7) were against the activities of Christians in the society. They were against the conversion and secularism. But in my research I found two respondents who were from Hindu background and they informed that they want multi- religious societies in Nepal. A respondent (respondent- 4) who was against the conversion in the beginning of the interview gave wise answer here. She wanted to create multi religious society with good understanding between Hindu and Christian. She explained that people were converted in to Christianity because of different reasons but she wanted to have mutual relationship among all religious groups. She further said that everyone should respect each other's religion and faiths to create harmonious society.

After analyzing the interviews of 4 respondents who were from Hindu background, I found that 2 members were against the secularism and two were in favor of multi religious society. Moreover, this researcher has found that younger generation in the society were open minded and could easily accept the existence of Christianity in the society however old people and Hindu priests were against the Christianity. The people who have travelled in different places are happy in multicultural society. Because in my field study respondent number 4 was 22 years old and high school level education and respondent number 11 was 28 years old and Bachelor level education and travelled some countries. Both of them wanted to have multi religious societies in Nepal. However respondent number 6 was 60 years old and just literate and respondent number 7 was 39 years old with high school level education. And both of them expressed their views against Christianity.

4.7 Construction of the Churches in the Hindu dominant society

Church is a public building which is used by Christians for worshipping. Establishing churches in the centre of the Hindu dominant community is definitely a challenging job. According to the ministry report, *Church in Nepal*, Father Tranquillius had built the first Church in Nepal on March 24, 1760 near Kathmandu city and now there are 2799 Churches all over Nepal (Rai et al.2016 July 17). Christian members in the society, attend in the church in every Sunday to worship. They sing religious songs and dance in the music. They do all religious activities inside the Church. They baptize the newly converted people and organize mass healing program for the sick and depressed people. After establishing the Church in the community, Christian members

are feeling happy because they don't have to go another village to worship I knew this information from my respondents in the interview. They try to preserve their identity by practicing their cultures and traditions with same religious groups as described by Karmela, Liebkind . She says that cultural identity refers to the broad sense of cultural belongingness and shared values derived from group membership, a common history, tradition and language (Liebkind 1989:21).

After my research study I have found that Christian members in the society were happy after having a church in the community. They informed me that they have been getting economic help from the Christian organizations from abroad but also from the members of the local Church. After studying the views of Christian members in the society, I have also tried to explore the views of Hindus about the Churches in the society. Off course like other societies, Nepalese societies also have been multicultural and they are accepting the existence of churches in the society but the churches have been tolerating various criticisms by the Hindu society.



An image of a local church in the community

Image source: personnel field visit

Hindu members have not expressed their feelings directly with the Christian members but they have shared their dissatisfaction in the interview. One of my respondents shared his dissatisfaction in the following ways:-

...To be honest. ...I don't like the Church near my home and the opportunist people who have converted in to Christianity. These people have undermined their tradition and ancestors' religion and attracted after the charming slogans of foreigners. Now these people have got the money by the missionaries so they are doing unnecessary drama. One day when they would stop to get money they will come to Hinduism again... trust me (Respondent -7).

In this research, 2 out of 4 respondents from Hindu members in the society informed that the church in the community is only the place to conduct various activities against Hinduism. They also explained that Pastors in the church always think about converting the Hindus in to Christianity. Pastors used to give Bibles and Christian pamphlets to the local visitors which were criticized by Hindus in the society. According to the next participant he wanted to have school buildings and bridges in the community but Christian organizations have built the Churches. He has expressed his dissatisfaction such ways;

Well! Our children in the community don't have good school buildings and they have been dropping out their study every year. Many children can't go to school in the rainy season because we don't have bridges in the rivers especially in the hilly areas. But these Christian organizations are building lots of churches every year in the different places of the country. We need schools and bridges rather than churches. Our poor and illiterate villagers are almost like blind and following after the missionaries. The intention of these people is only to ruin our society by dividing us in the name of religions (Respondent -6).

Based on my research, most of the respondents from Hinduism responded that they need schools, bridges, libraries and other social infrastructures rather than churches. I found they are also right in some extent because I have seen many children facing difficulties to go their schools in the rainy seasons. Many children have been quitting their study because their schools are far from their homes. I hope Christian organizations would notice this in the future.

4.8 Christianity: Especial attraction for poor and low caste people

According to Pete Pattison, when we study the Christian societies in Nepal we can find that majority of the converted people are low caste people and poor people (Pattison 2017 August 15). There are different social and economical reasons behind it. "Hinduism has a caste system, and still in some remote places of Nepal, people believe in it and dominate the lower caste

people although, all the citizens are equal in the eyes of law” (Majupuria and Majupuria 2008:70). In the following lines same writers have informed about the brief introduction of caste system in Hindu society.

Most of the Hindus believe in caste system with the Brahmins occupying the highest position in the hierarchy. Many modified the rules governing the conduct, duties, and interrelationships of various notions. Manu is regarded as the founder of four castes: Brahmins-priests, Kshatriyas- warriors, Vaishyas-traders and Shudras- untouchables, gloriously called Harijans (ibid: 70).

According to the Majupuria and Majupuria, Hindu society was identified by their works for example; Brahmins were priest and Kshatriyas were warriors. In the Nepali society, identity is defined not only religion but also caste. “Identity is used to describe the way individuals and groups define themselves and are defined by others on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion , language and culture” (Fearon 1999 :4). Here lower caste people in the society seem to look for both religious and social identity. In the interview respondent number 3 and respondent number 12 were from dalit (lower caste) background and expressed their ideas that they were suppressed by both Hindus and upper caste people and they wanted to establish their reputed social and religious identity.

When so called ‘lower caste people’ felt inferior and exploited by the ‘higher caste people’ they looked for some safe places where they found equality. Finally they found Christianity is the best religion than Hinduism and converted there because ‘religion can be a key source of identity formation and maintenance, ranging from personal conversion experience to collective association with fellow believers’ (Coleman and Collins 2004: 03). The dalit (lower caste) people and their conversions are described by Pete, Pattission in *The Guardian* in the following ways;

It is Dalits, and other marginalized groups, who are leading a surge in the growth of Christianity in Nepal. More than a million people in Nepal identify as Christians, and the country has one of the fastest growing Christian populations in the world. The Federation of National Christian Nepal says 65% of Christians are Dalits (Pattison 2017 August 15).

In the interview, I have tried to find out that why most of the Dalit and poor people have been attracting towards Christianity. After the interview, I found that most of these people are poor and they would get economical and social help from the Christian society so they have converted there. When I asked the reasons behind conversion one candidate shared his ideas in such ways;

I was born in the poor family in the rural part of Nepal. This society blamed our family as a Dalit (lower caste). Not all, but some of the Brahmins people behaved us like inferior. They didn't allow us to stay with them even in public places. I felt alone and unhappy because I have not any faults. One day, my friend informed me about Christian society and their help for the poor people then I converted into Christianity. Now, my church has been helping me for my study too and no one tells me untouchable here (Respondent-3).

Based on my interviews, caste system in the Hinduism is a vital reason behind conversion in to community and there are other reasons too. In the interview, participant number 3 also informed that the caste discrimination in the society and poverty have been playing significant role for conversion and also true faiths. For him personal and social reasons inspired him to convert in to Christianity. "For some poor people in Nepali society, church and different Christian organizations have provided foods and some financial help" (Mbakwe 2017 April 24). After natural disasters like earth quake, floods, landslides etc. poor people have become poorer and helpless. When they knew about the social works of Christian missionaries' then they converted in to Christianity. Here, respondent number 7 claimed that in the society poor and low caste people are uneducated and innocent therefore Christian missionaries easily convince them for conversion. In the interview, when I have asked the reasons behind conversion to a person from Hinduism he gave this answer, "In my opinion, this people are illiterate and they don't know the value of their tradition. They got convinced easily by the Christian missionaries and also get little money from them" (Respondent-7). Thus, after studying the Nepalese society I find that there are different reasons behind conversion. They are personal, social, religious and economical reasons. Here I want to include the ideas of Rambo (quoted by Dhakal, 2014) to study about conversion.

Rambo purposes the four components of conversion: culture, social, personal, and religious system. In addition, he also added the discipline of anthropology, sociology; psychology and religious studies must all be taken into account about the subject of conversion with considering of politics, economics, and biology and so, forth should also be noted of converts (Dhakal2014:23).

As we talked about the motifs behind conversion, the significant reasons behind conversion are complex and unnecessary rituals of Hinduism. In Hinduism there are numerous rituals and traditions since birth to death. In every rituals and festivals people have to spend lots of money and poor people become poorer and poorer. There are so many complexities in the birth, marriage and funeral process in Hinduism which help people to be poorer. But there are not so

many rituals and traditions in Christianity so poor people have been attracting there. The other reason behind conversion I found after study is negligence of the Nepal government. Nepal government should help the citizens in the natural disasters and in difficult situations. When common citizens don't get the help from the government definitely they will attract towards Christianity where they have found help and hope. During this interview time, I have asked the reasons behind conversion of poor and low caste people and also the current condition of Nepalese Christianity to the local pastor, he explained me this answer;

Yes, in the past (about 20 years ago) people in the Nepalese societies were uneducated and only lower caste and poor people used to convert in to Christianity but now Christianity is popular in every Nepalese societies and even upper caste and educated people have converted. In every church, you can find the educated and upper caste people. Now society has been changing and Christians and Christianity have their own distinct identity in Nepal (Respondent- 9).

Over all, after analyzing the responses of my participant number 9 and other related literary sources I came to conclude that there Christianity is spreading rapidly in Nepal and majority of the lower caste and poor people and also some high caste people are the members of the Nepalese Christian societies. Participant number 9 also informed that it was true that most of the poor and lower caste people used to convert into Christianity about twenty years ago but now even rich and upper caste people have been converting into Christianity. This means Nepalese society has been changing and according to him Christians have their own identity. All the Christians are self awareness for their rights and religious and social identity because "Self-awareness and forms of choice underline the social construction of identity" (Coleman and Collin2004: xi).

4.9 Over View

Data which I have received after field study and interview responses have helped us to explore the current scenario of Nepalese Christian society. By selecting 12 participants from both Christian and Hindu society, I have analyzed the various social problems and other related issues. Various literary sources and related theories like identity, religion and conversion have applied to analyze the challenges of Nepalese Christian societies. The interview responses are classified in to eight separate topics and analyzed them by the use of examples and coding. In the initial phase, this research has explored about the social problems faced by Nepalese Christians.

In the society Christians are in minority and they have been facing various challenges. They are behaved as inferior and follower of Foreigners' religion. In some remote parts of Nepal, they are even alienated by the Hindu dominant society therefore Christians are forced to make their own religious society and help each other. They have been uniting and struggling to create their own identity. Various Christian organizations have been working in the social sectors of the country. They have built hospitals, schools, hydro power and churches in the community to win the hearts of common citizens. Nepal is a secular country and according to the law all the religions are equal. But in the interview most of the Christian members expressed their dissatisfaction towards government. They informed that the government is not supporting them as it supports to the Hinduism. But government representative said that government behaves equally to every religion. The fourth part of this chapter has tried to find out the reasons behind conversion. Many respondents from Christian society expressed their views that true faiths on Christ, caste system in the Hinduism, natural disasters, various kinds of sicknesses, influences from friends and relatives, poverty, opportunity in the new religion, human nature and globalization are the significant reasons behind conversion. But Hindu members in the society blamed the Christian as an opportunist, sinner, violators of the traditions and follower of foreigners. Therefore it is difficult for the converted people to persuade their family members, friends and relatives who are Hindus. In the society, majority of the members are Hindus and Buddhists therefore it is difficult task to build the churches. After constructing the church in the community, it has faced numerous criticisms. In the last part of this chapter, this research has tried to study that why poor and low caste people in the society have been converted in to Christianity. After the interview, I found that inequality in the Hindu society, caste system and poverty are important factors behind low caste and poor peoples' conversion. However, the local pastor in the community informed that it was some years ago most of the lower caste people and poor people used to convert in to Christianity but now the society is changing and even higher caste people, rich and educated people have converted in to Christianity. He also informed that other people's attitudes towards Christianity have been changing and now Christianity is one of the identified religions in the society.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

The prime focus of this research study are to find out the various struggles and challenges of Nepalese Christians in the Hindu dominant society ,views of Hindus towards Christians and Christianity , reasons behind conversion in to Christianity and reactions from the Hindu dominant society after conversion . When we study the outer skin of the Nepalese societies, we can find the harmonious relationships among all religious groups but when we examine deeply we can find various hierarchies among different religions. Marginal religious groups have been tolerating different types of social and religious challenges since origin to present date. To explore the gist of my research I have taken the help of interview method and later analyzed the data by the help of various literary sources, conceptual theories and coding of the respondents. Religious conversion is restricted in the constitution of Nepal (2015) therefore; Christians have been facing social and religious criticisms in the society. To preserve their own identity they have been developing and protecting their religion by engaging in social activities. The targeted groups in this research are conscious for their identity and religion which is discovered by the help of interview data and later analyzed the data by the help of theories like identity, religion and conversion. To find out the religious and social problems of this society various theories about identity and conversion have been significantly applied here which have helped to understand the society. The data presentation and analysis chapter which is roughly divided into eight different sections is the heart of this research to understand the social and religious challenges faced by Nepalese Christians. As per the reactions of the respondents, Christians in the Nepalese society have been facing various discriminations and criticism. News against Christians for example; two students from rural part of Nepal, did not get financial help from their family for converting into Christianity (Worldwatchmonitor2016August 18), bomb exploded in a church of Nepal (The Kathmandu Post, 2015 September 15) and Christians not allowed to go inside the holy Hindu temple (Dubey 2006 February 27) have informed that Christianity in Nepal have been facing various social challenges in the society. Moreover, the respondent number 1 was teased by his friends after converting into Christianity, respondent number 2 was blamed as an opportunist and respondent number 3's experiences have informed us that conversion is not easy in the society. Christians in Nepal want to create their individual and social identity in the society therefore they have tried to win the hearts of the public by doing different social works and also spreading the message of Jesus Christ in the society.

The second significant part of this research study is to focus the social works of Christian organization in the Nepali societies and also the views of Christian and non Christian's views towards social works. Himal Partner, United Mission to Nepal (UMN), International Nepal Fellowship and many other organizations have been working in Nepal in the sectors of Health, education, and gender equality. In the interview, respondent number 5 has admired the social works of Christians organization openly and found it is better than Hinduism and respondent 6 (traditional Hindu) praised about the hospital run by UMN. But respondent number -7 was unsatisfied with the emergence of Christianity and blamed Christianity as a threat to Hinduism. Some of my respondents in this research were unsatisfied with the Nepali government. Here, respondent number- 3, 8 and 9 informed that government is not supporting to the Christian organizations and strict rule against conversion is target to Christianity. Off course Nepali society is changing gradually and people are becoming open minded. There is a vast difference between 20 years ago and now. Respondent number 3 and 10 shared their experiences of past and present. The condition of Christianity was very bad in the past now it is better but they informed me that they need to achieve a lot in the future. We can find various reasons behind conversion in Nepalese society. Personal, Social, religious, economical, intellectual, contextual etc. are playing significant roles to convert Hinduism to Christianity. Both gradual and rapid conversions are found in this society. In this research respondent number- 3 was converted into Christianity because of true faith in Jesus Christ, respondent number 12 was converted because of social inequality and caste system in Hinduism and respondent number 10 was converted because of her personnel reason. In Rambo's (1993) term we can say that culture, society, person and religion are components of conversion which is directly applied in Nepalese Christian societies too. Though there are various reasons behind conversions, most of them have faced social challenges and criticism from the Hindu members of the society in the beginning. My respondent number 11 (Hindu) and 4 (Hindu) were appreciating the good motifs and works of Christianity and wanted harmonious society where as respondent number 6 is against Christianity in Nepal. Like other societies Nepali societies have also both views towards Christianity. "Now Nepalese Christians have their own churches and their members have been increasing" (Rai et al 2016 July 27). In this research, Christian members have built their own church in the community which has become matter of talking in the society. Christians are happy because they don't have to go far to worship. "In the society most of the converted people are

from lower caste (Dalit)” (Pattission, 2017 august 15) therefore I have asked the questions and my respondent number 3 and 9 were accepted this. They informed that in the Hinduism some people believe in upper caste and lower caste which has inspired the people to convert their religion because it is said that there is no caste system in the Christianity.

This research study is a descriptive research and qualitative research method is applied here. It has explored various social and religious challenges of Nepalese Christians since origin to present in Nepal. Various books, article, theories and internet sources have helped to analyze the interview and this research has concluded with open ending. The readers of this research are open to find out the solutions of different social and religious problem. This research has focused only a particular district (Chitwan district, which is almost in the central part of the country) and only studied about social and religious problems of the Christian society, views of non Christians about Christianity and reasons and reactions after conversion. The findings of this research might be relevant to other parts of the country too.

As a conclusion of this research, Christians in Nepalese societies have been struggling to develop their religious identity. Nepali society has accepted secularism and religious tolerance in the present date and in most of the places there is harmonious relationships among all religious groups in spite of some exceptional cases. To create mutual and harmonious society, all the members in the society should respect each other’s existences and learn the good lessons from others because the main motto of the all religions is same.

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