

Note on Terminology and Transliteration

My transliteration is based on the standard diacritic practice for transliterating Devanagari script according to the International Organization for Standardization (ISO 15919), except when it comes to the letters च and छ. For these letters, I follow the standard Nepali transliteration practice *ch* for च (*c* in the ISO system), and *chh* for छ (*ch* in the ISO system). I use diacritics and transliterated terms throughout the text. I do not use diacritics for proper names and terms that are commonly used in English (e.g., Panchayat).

There is a debate in academic and ethnic activist circles regarding the designator “Nepali” versus “Nepalese.”¹ This debate highlights the politics of recognition in postcolonial South Asia. During their colonial rule, the British used the term “Nepalese” to refer to people who were citizens of the nation-state of Nepal. In English, “Nepalese” was the accepted term until the past few decades, during which time the term “Nepali” gained currency. This shift marked a move away from colonial prescribed terminology to a term that more accurately reflects the ethnonym as it is spoken in the national language, Nepali (Nepali are the speakers of the Nepali language). Since the 1990s, however, there has been debate around these terms among ethnic activists, the contention being that “Nepalese” is more inclusive because the British colonial administration used it to designate all the citizens of Nepal, whereas “Nepali” implicitly excludes people whose mother language is not the national language, furthering the history of internal colonization and co-optation led by the Shah rulers. The Kathmandu Valley was the homeland of indigenous Newars; they called the land Nepal and their language was Nepal Bhasa (often called Newari in English). After conquering the Kathmandu Valley, the Shah monarchy relocated the central seat of its empire from Gorkha to Kathmandu and co-opted the Newar’s place-name and communal designator, renaming their Khas language Nepali and the Shah monarchy’s territory Nepal.

Nevertheless, I have chosen to use the term “Nepali” because it is the term that my interlocutors use. To make things clearer, I do not use “Nepali” as the noun referring to people but use it as a descriptor that details who or what I am specifically referencing. For example, I refer to the citizens of Nepal as “Nepali citizens,” political actors as “Nepali political actors,” and the state of Nepal as the “Nepali state.” I only use “Nepali” in the noun form to reference the state language.