THE NEPALIS IN NORTHEAST INDIA

A Community in Search of Indian Identity

Editors
A.C. SINHA & T.B. SUBBA

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Dedicated To

NETRA PRASAD SHARMA

Born, educated and married in Kathmandu and employed as a peon in North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong in 1977, Netra Prasad was transferred to the Department of Sociology in 1981 and worked there for the next 18 years. He got separated from his first wife after the birth of a son, married a second time in Kathmandu and had two children from his second wife. He passed Matriculation, Bachelor of Arts, and a certificate course in computers privately. He got married to a Christian tribal lady in late 1980s in Shillong and died at her residence on March 25, 1999. It was his tribal Christian wife, who arranged for his last rites and rituals with late Sharma's relatives and Hindu friends in Shillong. She took none of the service benefits provided by his employer after his death and, in fact, she is getting his eldest son educated by providing him food and lodging. Though there was nothing against him on his service records, he was promoted as a Lower Division Clerk after 22 years of service, for which the order was received after his death. Sharma's life represents a poignant tale of an average Nepamul Bharatiya.

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We would now like to express our gratitude to Dr N.P. Goel, lecturer at the Centre for Supportive Learning Systems of NEHU for typesetting the manuscript.

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Prologue

A.C. Sinha

The Himalayas are inseparable from the Indian psyche. And whenever an Indian refers to them, the image of the Himalayan kingdoms of Nepal, Bhutan and (pre-1975) Sikkim flashes on the horizon. Among the three, Nepal is too obvious to be ignored. The hypothetical concern may follow the course below: Who are the Nepalese? They are like us; they are not exactly (like us). They have a king, the only sovereign Hindu king in the world, and the aristocrats from Nepal frequently marry among the Indian princely families. And who are the people of Nepal? They are either the Gorkha soldiers or the porters with loads on their back. They are like our Nagas in appearance. They are not only in India; there are Indian Nepalis as well. The present volume of about twenty-one articles is on the *Indians of the Nepalese Origin* (*INO*), translated in Nepali language, they are *Nepali Mulka Bharatiya* or simply, *Nepamul*. This new nomenclature may add to the confusion already existing. But the effort has to be made so that the community is distinctly separable from their Nepalese counterpart. Prof. T.B. Subba reports in the volume on the efforts made in the past and how they could not catch with imagination of the community.

When we suggest this new nomenclature, we have a number of reasons in our mind. Firstly, it is the literal translation of the reality, which speaks of the Nepalese 'past' and the Indian 'present'. Secondly, there is urgency to separate the 'Nepalese' from the Nepali 'Indians', because the overlapping identity has caused enough misery to the Nepamul. Thirdly, the term 'Nepali' suggested earlier against the 'Nepalese' has not been proved adequate for the purpose. The word does not separate 'Nepalese' from 'Nepali' either in pronunciation or the script in Nepali or other North Indian languages in the neighbourhood

of Nepal or in northeast India. Thus, the change in spelling has not been appreciated by bulk of the Nepali speaking illiterate masses. Fourthly, other terms such as Gorkha, Gorkhali, Bharpali, Pahari have all been found inadequate by some or other segment of the community and they led to new sets of controversies. Lastly, we should not feel shy of experimenting with new terms and concepts as per the need of the hour. The best example in this context is the currency of *Lhotshampas* for Bhutanese Nepalese. In this text we shall be referring to the Indian Nepalis as 'the Indians of Nepalese Origin' (INO) or Nepamul. The 'Nepalese' will refer to the nationals of Nepal; 'Gorkha' in the context of recruitment to the British Indian army; 'Gurkhas' to the British soldiers of Nepalese origin and "Nepali" to the Nepamul.[1]

The Indian diversity contains a substantial population of Indians of Nepalese Origin (the INO) in its northeast region, but their presence has not attracted the requisite attention it deserves. The INO are found in a significant number in all the seven or (now) eight states of the region. This is in spite of all forms of local and regional restrictions imposed on their movement. They are clubbed as foreigners and have attracted much attention of the political leaders in the region during the last couple of decades. Their nationality is invariably seen as a suspect. The origin of their significant settlement began during the British colonial rule. They were a valued community not only for agricultural works, clearing the forests, tea garden labour and construction work on roads and bungalows, but they were also faithful soldiers of the British empire. Some of their settlements in the province of Assam were a consequence of a threat perception of the British in the region. The same lot proved to be successful in finding a niche as agriculturalists, miners, and milkmen in post-independence period. A negligible few of them even rose to higher echelons of bureaucracy in the region. Yet, the vast majority of them live a deprived life, eking out their living by selling their manual labour. The educated among them have a tremendous cultural load: they are so much like many of their immediate neighbour, yet they are 'outsiders' despite the fact that most of them have been living in the region for more than one hundred years.

It is of importance that their history and what they have become during the last one hundred and seventy-five years are understood properly. Such a profile will certainly be different in each state of the

region inclusive of Darjeeling district of West Bengal and Sikkim, where they are in majority and have a fair degree of political security. Where they stand in the region needs to be looked into from as many angles as possible and a macro assessment is made out of it. Besides an assessment of such ground situation, it is imperative that certain issues like citizenship, nationality, ethnic identity, and the like are discussed threadbare. To begin with, our interest here would purely be to understand the aspects of this society and its problems. We are at the moment not ready to consider their political demands. However, their ideas of how best their problems could be solved would be most welcome even if the same are not immediately acceptable to their respective states or their country of origin. To begin with, the past hangs heavy on the community. And thus, it is imperative that the context in which they or their ancestors migrated from Nepal to India requires to be understood.

Nepal has a glorious history in which principalities and kingdoms were established and demolished leaving behind new sets of rulers. The medieval history of Nepal informs us of the existence of principalities loosely under the Mughal emperors. They also have a tradition in which a segment of the Nepalese claim to have migrated to Nepal from Rajasthan and Maharashtra in India. It is said that these soldiers of fortune and migrants founded two bunches of 22 (*Baisis*) and 24 (*Chaubisis*) principalities. Gorkha was one of those small principalities, whose ruler, Prithvi Narayan Shah, consolidated the small states into a strong Nepal in the middle of the 18th century through his foresight and military strategy. Naturally modern Nepal and its inhabitants have been no strangers to other peoples of South Asia in the past. They moved across their boundaries as others did to Nepal. However, such contacts were invariably at individual levels, on pilgrimage, trading and marital alliances. Furthermore, such contacts were isolated, sporadic and occasional in nature not leading to an appreciable size of human movement across the cultural and linguistic boundaries as it happened in the 19th century.

Reasons Behind the Immigration

Peoples of Nepal and India used to move across today's boundaries in past. Pilgrimage, trade, marital alliances, roving saints and warriors etc.

have been moving across the land from the Indian ocean to the Himalayas and *vice versa*. The Indian history informs us that during the age of Lord Buddha and emperor Ashoka, there was plenty of human movement between the Gangetic plains and the Himalayan region. This process continued all through the centuries till the British came to India and established their empire. The British proved to be a catalyst for an organized migration from the Nepal hills to the Indian frontiers. The reasons for such a significant human movement may broadly be divided into two. Firstly, the internal situation within Nepal made the lives of at least some of the subjects so difficult that they preferred to move out of the country. Secondly, many of them discovered that the British Indian Government had created a situation in which they were not only welcomed, but also preferred as more useful compared to the 'natives'. Furthermore, they found that life was relatively comfortable and they could even save some surplus for their kinsfolk left behind in the hills.

Push Factors in Nepalese Migration

Firstly, the classical Nepalese regime was notoriously a repressive one. The nose and ears of the vanquished adversaries were chopped off during the medieval period. In this context, Prithvi Narain Shah's drive in Kathmandu valley in mid 18th century may be cited. It is reported that the Gorkha king had ordered cutting of ears and nose of the defeated Malla supporters with a view to coercing them to submission. The regime considered some of the communities as enslavable. A type of serfdom was prevalent in Nepal. The basic law of the land was based on the Hindu *Dharamshastras*, in which differential punishment was awarded to criminals for the same crime considering their social status in the caste hierarchy. This provision treated the untouchables and tribes harshly. For example, even unintended disrespect to a Brahmin could lead to punishment and; even an accidental death of a cow could lead to a severe punishment to an alleged criminal.

Secondly, the life in the hills was really difficult because there was very limited arable land in the forested and snow-bound mountain region. Rice, the staple food of the ruling class, was grown in valley and on the banks of rivers but was usurped by the establishment in the form of taxes. With their primitive tools and techniques, the rural folk

could live on some marginal crops, roots, fruits and wild products with limited caloric food value. With the coming of the Europeans to India, a number of crops were introduced, which could grow on marginal hill tracts even with crude technology and provide sufficient caloric food value. Here mention may be made of cultivation of maize, potato, tomato and radish, which not only led to a better health and longevity of human life in the hills, but also added to employable man power. It turned out difficult for the increased population to live on the limited land even with the new miracle crops.

Pull Factors

There were a number of factors responsible for making the lives of the Nepalese more attractive in British India. Firstly, the British encountered the Nepalese in an adversary situation during the Anglo-Nepalese war of 1814-15. They found their adversary not only brave warriors, but also effective in wild, difficult and mountainous tracts. Moreover, they found them inexpensive, obedient and efficient even in trying circumstances. So much so that the British created a myth of brave and invincible Gorkha soldiers. Conversely, they realized that the higher caste Hindus and *Ashraf* Muslim Hindustani soldiers were less reliable after the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857. Thus, the British created another myth of martial races, in which the Gorkhas fitted ideally. By then, the Rana regime in Nepal had already emerged as one of the most repressive states even by classical feudal standards, which permitted the British to use Nepal as a soldier farm. We have shown in the text elsewhere how every Gorkha regimental centre led to settlement of the ex-soldiers' colonies in India.

Secondly, soon after the Anglo-Nepalese war, a series of events took place, which further helped the Nepalese migration to India. The Anglo-Burmese War, 1824-25 led to the entire northeast India coming to the British control. Darjeeling was acquired as a gift from the king of Sikkim in 1835 to establish sanatoria for sick European soldiers. Kalimpong and 18 Duars were annexed from Bhutan after the Anglo-Bhutanese War, 1864-65. Sikkim became a protectorate of the British in 1888 and the resident Political Officer, John Claude White, introduced a vigorous 'paharia' colonization of Sikkim. Consolidation of the British territorial expansion was secured through pursuing an aggressive 'Forward Policy

to the Himalayas', especially during Lord Curzon's regime culminating in Francis Younghusband's Lhasa Expedition of 1903-04. This acquisition of thinly populated, entirely wild and mountainous tract eastward of Nepal from Darjeeling to Arakan hills within 75 years required a loyal and reliable man power, which could swiftly move without a murmur and work as an ethnic buffer between hill and plains communities. Furthermore, the tribal hill tracts in northeast India continuously necessitated armed pacification expeditions to be sent. Needless to add that the Nepalese were always available as a regular army, police, constabulary or the coolie corps to restore the law and order.

In the context, the Nepalese were considered as a counter balance against the Bhotia's intransigence. Herbert Risley figuratively put it way back in 1894 in terms of religious conflict between the Hindu Nepalese (Gurkhas) and the Buddhist Bhotias, in which he predicts that the Hindu Nepalese would have their way: "The Lepchas are rapidly dying out; while from the west, the industrious Newars and Gurkhas are pressing forward... Here also religion will play a leading part. In Sikkim, as in India, Hinduism will assuredly cast out Buddhism, and prayer wheel of the lama will give place to the sacrificial implements of the Brahmins. The land will follow the creed; the Tibetan proprietors will gradually be dispossessed (by the Gurkhas?) and will be taken themselves to petty trade".[2]

Thirdly, a Shingpho tribal chief from the farthest Indian frontier in the Patkoi hills, acquainted the British commercial explorers in 1820s of an insignificant plant from his nearby jhum fields, as tea, which turned out to be a commercial miracle. The Assam Company was founded in 1838 as a joint stock company to introduce organized tea plantation mainly for exporting it to Europe. This development required a reliable and inexpensive labour force to clear the jungle for making way to the plantation. Incidentally, introduction of tea plantation and colonization of Darjeeling took place in 1830s. In course of time, the Brahmaputra valley, Patkoi Hills, Barak valley, Chittagong Hills, the Duars and Darjeeling hills—all turned into thriving tea plantations. For that along with the tribal labour force from Chotanagpur, the unskilled Nepalese labour played a significant role in jungle clearance and running of the tea plantations in various ways.

Fourthly, the British developed a policy of forest reservation and

management in 1860s turning a considerable portion of jungle into reserve forest. These forests required periodic commercial timber extraction. Besides that, the state introduced cinchona, rubber, pepper, coffee and other herbal plantations. Commercial timber extraction required strong muscle power as '*arakasias*' (sawyers) or '*tangaits*' (axemen), who cleared the forests from Bhutan to Arakan Hills. In course of time in the absence of local labour, the forest department established a series of 'forest villages' as a source of captive labour, mandated to work for the forest department for a minimum number of days in a year. Needless to add that the Nepalese took advantage of it and settled in forest villages and got engaged in cattle rearing, dairy business and agriculture. J.C. White, the first Political Officer posted at Gangtok to watch over the British interests in Sikkim, Bhutan and Tibet, recorded on the issue of the Nepalese immigration to Sikkim: "But the country was very sparsely populated, in order to bring more land under cultivation, it was necessary to encourage immigration, and this was done by giving land on favourable terms to Nepalese, who as soon as they knew it was to be had, came freely in. Earlier in my service I had spent over a year in Nepal on special duty and had learnt something of the people and their ways which proved now to be of use in dealing with them".[3]

Lastly, the British could develop faster mode of transport such as railways, roads, and even waterways in Assam and Bengal. Coming from roadless interior of Nepal, the Nepalese felt encouraged to travel to distant places for the paid work such as army, military police or even as a member of the coolie corps. In course of time, a series of recruitment depots were established at Dehradun, Gorakhpur, Laheria-serai (Darbhanga), Ghoom (Darjeeling) and Shillong, to easily attract the hill men from Nepal for the recruitment. Furthermore, pension disbursement centres, welfare schemes such as soldier boards and medical facilities made it very attractive for the Nepalese to enlist for the jobs in the British establishments. Such earnings from India in cash-starved rural Nepal was considered prestigious thing for an average Nepali family.

Academic Odyssey to the Seminar

My interest in the 'Nepalese' community is longer than my academic

career stretching to nearly four decades. It unconsciously began in Gangtok in March 1964, where I was on an excursion tour along with my class friends from Ranchi University, Ranchi. We chanced to observe the convoy of cars in which the last king of Sikkim, Palden Thondup Namgyal, brought his American queen, Hope Namgyal to his capital. I was simply a part of the curious crowd of onlookers. It was a cold reception on a sunny day. C.D. Rai, the Officer on Special Duty from the Government of Sikkim, looking after our requirements, confided in us that the Sikkimese-*Qazis* and commoners alike—were apprehensive of the royal marriage. On further probing, he informed us that it would be difficult for the Buddhist kingdom and its dominant Hindu subjects to welcome the American Christian queen. Further, he added that this segment of the subjects, who forewarned the previous king, Tashi Namgyal, not to welcome his newly wedded Tibetan consort, who had given birth to an illegitimate girl on her maiden trip from Tibet to Gangtok in 1940. Tashi Namgyal built a palace outside the town for the "queen", but she was not welcomed to royal palace as long as he was alive. The Nepalese subjects had informed their ruler that they considered the royalty as an incarnation of the divine, who were to be worshipped provided they confirmed to the convention of purity. This was my first lesson in complexity of the Nepalese presence in the Himalayan kingdoms.

With a view to collecting field data from Sikkim for my Ph.D. thesis I reached Sikkim in 1970. That was the time, as per the Nepalese apprehensions the royal consort, Hope Namgyal, was busy organizing the 'Sikkim Study Forum', a centre of doubtful credential, for espousing the cause of 'Sikkim's independence'. The king was captive to a bunch of ill-educated courtiers, who imagined themselves as the functionary of an independent Sikkim. These elements informed me that they did not approve of my study and as such I had no business to ask them of their co-operation. In such a situation, I turned to the only course left to me, the common subjects of Sikkim—the *Nepalis*—for the support. Needless to add that I did collect data from all segments of the Sikkimese society in course of time (Sinha, 1975). However, I realized two aspects of the Sikkimese reality: the palace-centred feudal one and the populist perspective of the commoners. Thus, I concluded my thesis. "The Sikkimese political system presents a rare example in the world polity. Sikkim is the only country where a tug of war between the past Tibetan

theocracy and the liberal democracy is going on. While the former is well entrenched, the latter has also been accepted in theory. With increasing exposure of the Sikkimese relatively isolated elite to the world outside, the tradition of liberal democracy appears to entertain the aspirations of the overwhelming mass of Sikkimese. However, in this tug of war between the two processes of the political culture, the former appears to be winning because its champions could out-manoeuvre those of the latter by eliciting an external support."[4]

All through 1970s Sikkim was in turmoil. So much so that the façade of Indian protectorate over Sikkim was discarded at last and Sikkim became the 22nd Indian state in 1975. The Nepalis waged an anti-feudal struggle and got an Indian state to call it as their home at last. There were apprehensions in certain quarters in India that the Nepali loyalty lay with their cultural front, Nepal. As a reply to it, a perceptive statement still rings in my ears: "Our ancestors from Nepal joined the bigger Indian umbrella, under whose shade the little Nepali umbrella was sheltered. There is no reason why should we opt now for the little one". I had the opportunity to learn something at the feet of late Parasmani Pradhan in Kalimpong, who represented the most erudite and sophisticated tradition of scholarship among the Nepalis. It goes without saying that they have been proud of their heritage and many of them still maintain numerous ties with their kinsmen in Nepal. A variant of such ties is that of double citizenship.

In the backdrop of the anti-foreigners agitation by the students in Assam, a seminar was organized in Shillong in 1980 on 'Tension and Conflict in Northeast India.' Most of the papers contributed to the seminar were either on immigration of the Bangladeshis or on inter-ethnic issues. The present writer contributed an article: 'The Nepalese in Northeast India: Ethnicity and Resource Appropriation', which was largely ignored by the distinguished scholars. We had concluded the article thus: "The Nepalese in northeast India may identify themselves ideologically as the Nepalese sub-nationals against their Indian, Hindu, and caste/tribal identities. This is an empirical situation in which the most rewarding identity for them would be to follow the ethnic ideology so that they could separate themselves from the overlapping traits with 'others' (e.g., the non-Nepalese) and restrict themselves to their distinction. The Nepalese leaders would be hard pressed to disengage

their community from class, political, regional, and even religio-cultural affiliations with others. This is the logical situation of an immigrant and economically weak community to emphasize its cultural identity as an organizational tool to acquire a bargaining situation in a plural society. Thus, the Nepalese may get themselves organized to preserve, propagate and even increase their ethnic solidarity. And this newly acquired Nepalese solidarity would naturally clash with heightened expectation of the host communities in the northeast India."[5]

I happened to be in Thimphu (Bhutan) in course of my study on the Bhutanese theocracy in 1978.[6] I was invited to the cultural programme on the concluding day of the Graduate Orientation Programme. There was plenty of beer and eats for the invitees and it was a relaxed atmosphere. What struck me as noteworthy was the crude caricature by a Drukpa joker of all the items presented by the Nepalese (the *Lhotshampas*, the Southerners or the inhabitants of Southern Bhutan, an euphemism for the Bhutanese Nepalese residing in five southern districts of Bhutan) artists. The partisan involvement of the audience was obvious. The simple performance of the Drukpa artists commanded a rapt attention of the audience, but the more artistic, delicate and sophisticated Nepali performances were intruded by the joker, who managed to divert the audience to his absurdities at the cost of the sterling performances of the artists. It was not only a comical act, but it was a deliberate humiliation of the Nepalese presence. Even then I could imagine that things would not go like that forever.

As an aftermath of the students' anti-foreigners agitation in Assam, Shillong, the capital of the Indian state of Meghalaya and the seat of North-Eastern Hill University, was subjected to an anti-Nepalese agitation in 1987. Two of my students from the Nepali community (one, born and brought in Shillong and the other, born in Bhutan, but educated in Shillong) were forced to run away from Shillong (one, to Kathmandu, where she got married and settled, and other one to Darjeeling). And that was the time I was articulating the issues associated with the immigrants from Nepal *vis-à-vis* the Indians of Nepalese origin: "How do they belong to the Indian commonwealth of cultures and religions? In what ways their history, culture, language and traditions become Indian? Will the efforts of the Nepalese to seek an Indian identity be construed as the extension of the genuine policies, programmes and

interests of Nepal? What will be the economic cost and political implications of transformation of the Nepalese into Indians? ... What will happen to those who possess multiple citizenship as Nepalese, Bhutanese and as an Indian? ... Will the acceptance of the Nepalese as Indians in such a situation affect the Indian defence interests?[7]

The Bhutanese stand exclusively for the Drukpa nation and they view the Nepalese presence in their country as an ethnic intrusion. So much so that they did not acknowledge the existence of the Nepalese as a distinct ethnic group up to 1950s, when they introduced the first Citizenship Act, 1958. For the next three decades a policy of ethnic assimilation of the Nepalese within the Drukpa fold was followed vigorously. This policy of assimilation was based on the belief that Buddhism and Hinduism had a lot of commonality in terms of myths, theology and pantheon. However, even this flawed policy was discarded in 1980s leading to the exodus of thousands of the *Lhotshampa* refugees to Nepal and India. Since then the Lhotshampas have been trying to return to Bhutan with an assured future and honour. In the process, they have exposed themselves with all their organizational weaknesses: "Most of the leaders of dissent groups are so conscious of their status that they appear to demand instant loyalty from the ordinary activists. They do not accord equal status to brother activists. They are not used to organize the masses and, in fact, they had been ordering them in the past. They are impatient with the nitty-gritty of the public organisations and they are in a hurry to fashion an alternative forum for themselves ... The leaders are faction-ridden among themselves, suspicious of each other and cliquish in their behaviour. In fact, it appears that the *Lhotshampa* dissenters are crowded with leaders."[8]

The Seminar on the Indians of Nepalese Origin (INO)

The Nepalese psyche in South Asia got further traumatized after the flight of over one lakh *Lhotshampa* refugees from Bhutan to Nepal and India. The Nepalese at large were puzzled and upset on the non-concern of the plight of the refugees in India. The repeated pleas made by the Royal Government of Nepal and refugee leaders to the Indian establishment to intervene on their behalf fell on deaf ears. The INO also continued to be evicted from their home and hearth, were subjected to physical violence and went on suffering all sorts of discrimination in

spite of the legal provision in their favour. To our surprise, apart from the government apathy, negligible coverage on the part of the media and lack of an effective community leadership, even an otherwise active and alert Indian intelligentsia almost maintained a guarded silence on the issue. In such a situation, I have been talking on the issue with my academic fraternity in general and those in particular, who have interest in the Himalayan Studies. I got a moral boost from Kanak Mani Dixit during our Bhutan confabulation at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London in March, 1993. Since then I have been discussing the problem on the complicated presence of the INO with my academic associates Imdad Hussain, Tanka B. Subba, Deepak Gyawali, Kanak Dixit, Sanjoy Hazarika, to mention a few.

To begin with our ideas on the topic were imprecise. However, we did desire to interact with fellow academics concerned with the INO, who were willing to provide data on lives and institutions and analyse them academically. We prepared a tentative draft and discussed it among ourselves and deliberately kept it broad-based keeping in mind that we really did not have sufficient data to make general statements. We took time to locate scholars, who were reticent and reserved, and reluctant to write on their own community. Then, there was a problem of language. From the very beginning, we decided that the scholars could write in any language they would prefer to. And at the end we did receive a couple of papers in Nepali language. There was also the issue of finance. We announced the date of the seminar, once finance was assured to us. Then we learnt that one of the prime movers of this enterprise, Kanak Mani Dixit, had met with an almost fatal accident high in the Himalayas. It was no more possible to postpone the date of the seminar, but we were fortunate enough to receive a senior intellectual from Nepal, Kamal Mani Dixit, as a participant, who could moderate on sensitive issues in course of our deliberations. Our objectives of holding the seminar were the following:

i) To prepare an inventory of the INO in the region from demographic, legal, linguistic, educational, economic and political points of view;

ii) To appraise the contributions of the community as soldiers, dairymen, herdsmen, agriculturists, litterateurs, and labourers of various types; and

iii) To discuss certain conceptual issues close to the INO and their immediate social world such as ethnicity, identity, citizenship, nationality, etc.

We had sent three circulars to about three dozen scholars drawn from northeast India and a select team of scholars from Nepal. Most of them enthusiastically accepted the invitation and many of them made queries on academic aspects or logistics of the seminar. As a whole the response to our invitation was overwhelming—especially from among the younger Nepalese intelligentsia. We approached the University Grants Commission (UGC) sponsored special programme at the Department of Sociology (DRS), and North-Eastern Regional Centre (NERC), the branch of Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), New Delhi for financial support. Though we had to adjust the timing of the seminar, we are thankful to the coordinator, DRS Programme in Sociology, Director (Honorary) and Deputy Director, ICSSR (NERC) for their support. The seminar was held on March 13-15, 2001 in seven sessions in which 20 presentations were made. It was an experience to witness the enthusiasm of the first generation young scholars from among the INO of the region. There were a number of issues on which the seminarists debated and came to certain consensus; there were others on which no agreement could be reached. At the end, it was agreed that the authors would revise their papers in the light of the comments and discussions in the seminar and proceedings should be published at the earliest. However, in spite of the best of the efforts on the part of the authors, editors had no choice but to exclude a couple of presentations for the sake of quality and uniformity in the volume.

The Themes in the Presentation

The volume in hand has been divided into three parts: The Background, Predicament of Existence, and Issues: Imagined and Real. The background surveys the geographical spread, history, recruitment to the army and social profile of the community. The section contains two chapters, which were not originally written for the volume but they have been included in the proceedings because they serve as background materials for a majority of articles included in the volume. A.C. Sinha provides a general survey of the Nepamul in the northeast region, their

history, locations of their habitations, variety of the vocations, the problems faced by the community and their aspirations. He identifies the root cause of all the problems with the differential perception of Nepal in the Indian mainstream. While the Nepamul feel that they are 'associate to the mainstream', the latter accords a 'peripheral status' to the former, a status, which is as well transferred to the INO. The author makes a plea that the Indians at large should ask themselves how far the genuine aspirations of the INO have been accommodated in the body politic of India. On the other hand, T.B. Subba tries to allay the fears of the local communities by arguing that the Nepalis do not pose any kind of threat to the local communities.

Imdad Hussain's is a key paper in the volume, which provides anchor sheet to the various presentations and brings out the nuances of the British recruitment policy on the Gorkhas and their earliest settlement sites in northeast region of India. Purushottam L. Bhandari traces the evolution and growth of the INO in the region and ends with a note on identity crisis of the community, which makes them vulnerable to discrimination and exploitation. K.K. Muktan's article documents the valours, sacrifice and overall role of the Gorkha soldiers during the British and post-colonial periods and their contributions to maintenance of internal and external security of India. Tek Narayan Upadhaya and Roma Adhikari have presented one of the most exhaustive documentation of the literary forays of the Nepalis in the region. Tejimala Gurung's paper traces out the historical roots of the INO settlements sponsored by the British colonial state as a human buffer in a hostile social climate and commercialisation and industrialisation helped the INO migratory momentum. So much so that while the first Indian Census of human population enumerates 983 Nepalis in Assam in 1872, the figure rose to 1,22,823 after seven decades, which worked out to be 1.39 per cent of the total population of the state. And, Sajal Nag tries to lend voice to the history of Nepalis, a marginalised and insignificant community, that is ignored in the mainstream historiography, which essentially deals with the dominant communities.

The second part of the book, dealing with Predicament of Existence, begins with T.B. Subba's article, which is followed by the articles written by Lopita Nath and Anindita Dasgupta, both of whom have made the first ever attempt to raise certain theoretical issues in respect of

the predicament of the Nepalis in the region. Kripa Prasad Upadhayaya shows another facet of the INO's life through details of their participation in the electoral process of Assam since independence.

With Sanjay Rana's paper our presentation shifts focus from Assam to Meghalaya. His presentation reports on the growth of various Gorkha institutions in and around Shillong, the premier city of the region. In his article on Nepali literature of Meghalaya, Govind Singh Rawat reports that Nepali literature grew eulogising the bravery of the Gorkha soldiers. Then, it picked up divine, romantic and at last, secular literature reflected through the short stories, novels and poems. Amena Nora Passah informs that the Census of India, 2001 records that 4.9 per cent Meghalayans from Khasi and Jaintia Hills districts are of Nepali origin. However, even among them, out of 7,39,012 Christians, only 0.68 per cent are of the INO background. She notes that in comparison to earlier decades, conversion to Christianity was picking up since 1980s among the younger generation, born, brought up and educated in the region.

K.L. Pradhan traces the INO settlement pattern in Mizoram to various compulsions of the British Military Police about a hundred years back. He suggests that wet paddy cultivation, horticulture and animal husbandry were introduced in Mizoram by the INO. In this section, the last article is on Manipuri Nepalis written by G.K.N. Chhetry. In this, he has highlighted various factors leading to the settlement of Nepalis in this ex-princely state.

In part three, certain putative and real issues relating to the INO are discussed. The section begins with a perceptive article by Kanak Mani Dixit on 'Greater Nepal', which punctures the myth and exposes the motives behind the calumny. Rhoderick Chalmers takes up the complex and significant issue of uniformity (*Ekrupta*) against the current diversity (*Bahurupta*) at the level of the Nepali language on the basis of his studies in Darjeeling. He makes a plea that the issue of uniformity should be seen in the light of emerging 'national consciousness' (*jatibhiman*) among the Nepamul. And A.C. Sinha shows his impatience with the confused situation in which the Indians of Nepali origin (INO) do not even have a name. This is not an issue of academic debate alone, but also vitally affects a considerable number of Indians in their everyday life. When the Bhutanese could agree to term their 'Nepalis' as Lhotshampas, which is just a two decades old nomenclature, why we

should not agree to *Nepamul Bharatiya* or *Indians of Nepalese Origin* or something else? The Indian state must also take a note of the restive situation among the Nepamul, who may take a 'U' turn from the hitherto integrationist to non-integrationist attitude towards the Union of India which is common among very many other marginalized communities of northeast India. At the end, T.B. Subba sums up this presentation through an 'epilogue'.

In a volume like this some repetition or overlap is unavoidable, although we have made efforts to minimize them as far as possible. Some of the articles have been editorialised to bring them at par with some other articles in the volume but care has been taken not to twist the main arguments therein. On the side of omissions, we have excluded Sikkimese scenario deliberately as it is the only 'state' in the Indian Union where INOs not only have a majority, but they as well rule the state as their 'home'. No doubt, they have their problems but their texture is different. Similarly, we have no substantial presentation on Darjeeling in spite of our efforts. (Chalmer's paper is an exception and it deals with the issue of language.) Similarly, we have no comments to make on the INOs spread all over India— especially in the western Himalayan foothills and metropolises such as Delhi and Mumbai.

An Overview

We find that the authors for the present volume are predominantly historians (8 out of 18), sociologists (2), and scholars drawn from Nepali literature and language (3). Besides that there is one anthropologist, one journalist and one retired scholar-administrator and one life-scientist. It is heavily dominated by men, with only 4 women authors, all of whom are incidentally historians. As much as about two-third of the authors are of younger generation below 40 years of age; two-fifth of them are of non-Nepali origin. Again except three, all the authors hail from northeast India and most of them belong to the Nepamul origin. The INO have a hazy past rooted in Nepal, which they find difficult to disown, even if they want to. At the same time, they feel hurt that they are not treated at par with the fellow Indian citizens. That is the reason why many of the authors in the volume have tried (i) to show that the Nepalis had been moving to northeast India even in the hoary past, (ii) that they did play a major role in consolidation,

pacification and defence of India, (iii) that they did play a considerable role in the freedom struggle against the British and (iv) that they have contributed to enrich the multicultural commonwealth of India through their language, literature and music, besides defending the republic against the internal and external threat.

One predicament of the northeast region is its ambivalence towards the INOs. It so happened that the British kept the Gorkha soldiers in a sanitised world of cantonments. But other segments of the INOs such as peasants, herdsmen, axemen, labourers, artisans and sundry Nepalis slowly and steadily got settled in the region. They were exploited, suppressed and occasionally even evicted, but also got assimilated in the host communities to an extent that they got married locally and produced children, who turned out to be 'Nepalis' only in name. It was rather difficult for the host communities to accept that the 'soldiers' and 'other settlers' were both from the same stock. Thus, they developed an ambivalence to the INOs, which occasionally gets expressed through arson, violence and eviction. Naturally, the INOs are forced to look westward to Nepal and their imagined past. But the Nepali world is itself undergoing a massive change. Moreover, the bilateral relations between India and Nepal come on the way of thinking on the INOs in northeast India. That is why the reaction from Nepal on the plight of the INOs is invariably individualistic, and not institutional. The Nepali diaspora, dispersed across half a dozen of the sovereign countries, finds the national boundaries exasperatingly exploitative and oppressive.

This was the first seminar of its type on the INO and, thus, it was largely exploratory in nature. However, it was realised that the meaningful presence of the community in the region begins with the arrival of the British Empire in the region in 1825. Secondly, the issue of their Indian identity as distinct from the Nepalis has not been resolved. It is a fact that all the terms to denote the community are found inadequate and not universally acceptable. Furthermore, the community itself is confronted with the issue of internal uniformity (*ekrupta*) and diversity (*anekta*). After all the Nepali community has sub-ethnic strata: Tagadhari, Newari, Kiranti, etc. to mention a few. Thus, various dimensions of the community life such as culture, language, ethnicity and religion demand intensive study. And lastly, the uniqueness of the INO lies in uncovering the regional facets of their life style. It is

imperative that the language, literature, poetry, dance and music of the community are seen as continuity from their traditions and at the same time, efforts should be made to examine their regional flavour. In this context, the case studies in the volume on settlement pattern, re-settled soldiers, peasant farmers, herdsmen, professionals, etc. become significant. The editors will feel gratified if the present work initiates a discussion on the issues raised in the volume on the Nepamul.

Notes

1. The correct spelling is Gorkha. Originally the word was spelt as 'Goorkha' by the British. In 1891 the spelling was changed to 'Gurkha', which remained till the end of the British rule in India. In 1949 February, the Government of India adopted the correct spelling as 'Gorkha'. (Muktan 2002:11).
2. Risley, 1894.
3. White, 1971.
4. Sinha, 1972.
5. Sinha, 1982.
6. Sinha, 1982A.
7. Sinha, 1990.
8. Sinha, 2001: 186.

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CHAPTER 1

The Indian Northeast Frontier and the Nepali Immigrants*

A.C. Sinha

Territorially large societies such as Indian provide challenges to the analysts because of their expanse and complexity. There is another obvious dimension: whether the Indian state and the Indian society are one and the same. While the former has a legal, formal, and constitutional existence, the same cannot be said about the latter. The frequent cliché about the Indian society is that of 'unity in diversity', acknowledging its plurality. Looking at the situation from an entirely territorial point of view, the Himalayas, and for that matter the northeastern frontier region, is peripheral to the mainstream. The Nepalis, nestling in the Himalayas and immigrating to the northeastern frontier region are the focus of our present analysis. We propose to examine briefly the Indian mainstream and the northeastern periphery. Secondly, we intend to examine the issue of the Nepali immigrants in India and analyse its various aspects. And finally, we would like to examine the questions of identity and the dilemma faced by the Indian Nepalis. We find the Indian Nepalis with conflicting identities—as Nepalis and as Indians—which have to be resolved for a happier Indian social scene and a harmonious way of life.

Mainstream and Periphery

Among the two approaches to understanding a large state such as India, the first may be identified as politico-cybernetic-communi-cational, in

* Reprinted with permission from N.K. Rustomji and C. Rambles (eds), *Himalayan Environment and Culture*, IIAS, Shimla, 1990.

which the key concern is with power and related concepts such as authority, control, dominance, influence, coercion, surveillance, and so on. The control of the state, defined as a political system with monopoly of the use of force over its territory, over the physical and human resources and its deployment of coercive devices are considered natural. In this context, the state is presumed to be like a unicellular organism with nuclei (core, centre, and capital), bodies (territorial expanse), and outer membranes (the boundary) with stomi (border passes, ports). It is considered as a system in which a continuous surveillance by the dominant of their subordinates' behaviour, and the deployment of threats and punishments are normal ingredients.[1] All these are performed in terms of power, which is defined as control over communication flows, located in the state, at point where selection is possible, decisions are made, and information is transmitted. Naturally, commands flow down from the centre to the periphery and information is demanded in the opposite direction. From this point of view, the extensive territory of India may be understood as a hierarchy of power centres branching out from a seat of ultimate decision making.

Alternatively, in the normative approach to understanding the phenomenon of state, power is substituted with a collective consensus on shared goals and values. Emphasis is placed on society, and social order is achieved through the spontaneous co-ordination of individual behaviour and not through a coercive power system. Status and prestige are peacefully and unanimously accorded to those who fill the most strategic roles in society. It is presumed that there is a central zone as a realm of values, beliefs, and emotions in the structure of society. This central zone also provides a set of activities, roles, and personnel within the network of institutions. In this way, the central zone is intimately connected with what society considers to be sacred and ideal, espoused by the ruling authority.[2] From this point of view, larger territorial entities such as India have a number of subsystems, which are organized through common and overlapping sets of values, ideals, and personnel. Needless to say the above subsystems characterize the pattern of authorities symbolized by individual behaviour.

These two approaches may appear apparently contradictory. However, as Strassold argues, real societies are mixture of both models; the politicological-cybernetic one strongly tied to a spatial pattern of

centre-periphery, and the sociological-culturological one, which is much more volatile in its spatial reference. No wonder then that both the 'materialistic' model based on power and communication and the symbolic model based on consent and shared meaning have been subjected to analysis through spatial categories such as centre-periphery (1980: 40).

If one examines the expanse of the Indian Union closely from the centre to the periphery from the points of view of religion, language, and political control as indicators of power structure, certain interesting patterns emerge. First, predominantly Hindu, Hindi-speaking and traditionally a Congress-supporting Rajasthan, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Delhi may be identified with the core or mainstream of the Indian system.[3] In terms of political power, they control 40 per cent of the seats in the Indian Parliament, the sovereign authority over the Indian landmass. Secondly, as associates to the core or mainstream we may identify states such as Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, West Bengal, Tripura, and Assam. These are also predominantly Hindu (though non-Hindi speaking), but also constitute a stronghold of the Congress or some 'national' parties with a few exceptions. They control 52 per cent of the states in the Indian Parliament. Thirdly, on the outer fringe of these two zones there are states such as Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab, Goa, Lakshadwip, the Andaman Islands, Mizoram, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, and Sikkim. These units are inhabited by predominantly non-Hindu, non-Hindi speaking communities and have a strong tradition of regional political parties.[4] They elect only 8 per cent of the members to the Indian Parliament. It may not be out of place to put on record that Jammu and Kashmir and Lakshadwip are the two Muslim majority states. Punjab is the only Sikh state, Sikkim is the only predominantly Buddhist state and Nagaland, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Arunachal Pradesh are the scheduled tribal states within the Indian Union. As a broad generalization, the first two categories may be identified with the core or mainstream, while the third zone may profitably be thought of as the periphery.

If one examines the northeastern frontier from the mainstream it appears vague, distant, and amorphous. Physical distance from the core is coupled with the insufficiency of the communication network. There

is no quick, effective, and convenient means of communication between the core and this region. In such a situation, those who go to the region consider themselves rather as pioneers, explorers, and adventurers. The white-collar functionaries come to the region on punishment, occasional promotions and out-of-routine postings. Very rarely does a functionary opt for a posting in this region. And why should he? After all, no significant decisions, even those affecting the local situations, are taken in the region. Consequently, a frontier functionary, who lives a deprived and inconvenient life, plays no role in the process of decision making; rather he is supposed to obey 'orders' from 'above' and to keep on filing the information.

On the other hand, the frontier communities equally feel the core to be complex, manipulative, mysterious, devoid of sensibility, and a jungle of rules. The moment they get out of their native environment, they confront language, food, transport and communication that are uncomfortable and unfamiliar. It is a fact that the better parts of the region became part of India effectively only during the last 150 years or so. Even Assam, the traditional Ahom land, came effectively under the Hindu fold (and thus to the mainstream) as late as the seventeenth century. That is why social structure, commensality, marital pattern, and festivals are uniquely Assamese. In such a situation, the various states in the region are not in a position to identify a collective code of conduct, a shared belief, and historically transmitted traditions along with the mainstream. This picture becomes all the more muddled when we examine the issues pertaining to the Nepali immigrants in the region, who are identified neither with the mainstream nor with the associates to the mainstream or even to the periphery or indeed any distinct territory of their own within the Indian Union.

Nepali Identity

In the traditional view, Nepal has been on the cultural frontiers of India and China. The legend goes that a celebrated ascetic called Ne 'cherished' or 'looked after' the land known as Nepal (Ne + *pal*: the country looked after by the ascetic Ne). In ancient Indian tradition Ne was a benevolent patron saint, the guardian of Nepal (Patterson 1983: 126). According to another tradition the Bodhisattva Manjusri, coming down from China, drained the Kathmandu valley by opening the southern

rocks and permitting water to flow down to the Indian plains as the river Bagmati.[5] The earliest inhabitants of the land are said to be Kiratas—a loose generic term for numerous tribes, who are claimed to have migrated from Assam and northeast India to Nepal. The Newars, a literate and cultured race, came to Nepal either from India or Tibet several centuries before the Christian era. Their industry, artistry, sculpture, architecture, language, and urbanity were identified as uniquely Nepali.

Another Indian wave of migrants went to Nepal in the form of Licchavi Hindu Rajputs, who introduced the classical Hindu institution of *varna*. More urbane Newars tried to assimilate the new role among themselves and for this reason they are known as *Buddhamargis* (worshippers of the Buddha) and *Shivamargis* (worshippers of the Hindu deity Shiva). Thus, Hinduism and Buddhism co-exist in Nepal, a state of affairs epitomised by the sacred centres of the Hindu Pashupati and the Buddhist Swayambhunath temples in Kathmandu. It appears that the Kiratas were pushed to the northeastern part of the country, where their descendants are found as Rais, Magars, Limbus, and other tribes even today.

The contemporary usage of the terms Gorkha and Nepali has a recent history. In the beginning of the eighteenth century, the land between the valley of Kathmandu and Kumaon was fragmented into forty-six lordships, grouped into two loose confederations. The *Baisis* (twenty-two principalities) were located in the Karnali basin and the *Chaubisi* (twenty-four principalities) were in the Narayani (Gandaki) basin. These principalities were theoretically under the Mughal emperor of India, but in practice they were autonomous. The Shah family of Gorkha, a small state in Chaubisi and alleged to be migrants from Chittor in Rajasthan, emerged as a strong force under their ruler, Prithvi Narayan Shah, in the middle of the eighteenth century. The Gorkhas proceeded to conquer the entire valley, defeating the Malla rulers of Kathmandu and Patan in 1768 and Bhatgaon in 1769, and the Gorkha ruler thus acquired for himself the title of 'the king of the hills'. The Gorkha forces increased their might and by 1815 they had subjugated the territories from the Tista river in the east to the Sutlej river in the west, and from the northern Gangetic plains to the high Himalayan ranges. In the course of time, the Gorkhas, or 'Nepalis', turned out to be a nation of several

tribes and castes, who claimed to be the descendants of the original subjects of the Gorkhas and who speak the language called Gorkhali or Nepali.

From an ethnological point of view the Gorkhas or Nepalis can be divided into three major ethnic stocks. First, the Kiratis, claimed to be the earliest inhabitants of the land, are divided into a number of largely endogamous tribes such as Rai, Magar, Limbu, Lepcha, Tamang, etc., who speak their own languages, are either Hindus, Buddhists, or animists and are located in the northeastern and eastern part of Nepal.[6] They are traditionally hillmen, are fond of forests and ethnologically closer to the northeastern tribal region of India. Secondly, the Newars, an urban trading and commercial stock mainly in the Kathmandu valley and eastern Nepal, are also divided into a number of castes among themselves.[7] The Newars, who possess their own script, language, arts, crafts, and architecture, are bilingual like the Kiratis, since besides their native Newari they also speak Nepali. Their contribution to the Nepali tradition is immense and they are one of the three pillars of the present Nepali rule.[8] It is an enterprising community, spread all over Kathmandu valley, eastern Nepal, Sikkim, Tibet, Darjeeling and northeastern India. Thirdly, the Tagadharis, the Nepali counterpart of the Indian Hindus, with their concept of purity and pollution. Though they are found in all parts of Nepal, they are settled mainly in the western and central regions and the Kathmandu valley. On another plane, the Nepalis can be divided into two groups[9]: the *tagadharis* (those who are entitled to the sacred thread) and *matwalis* (those who are outside Hindu orthodoxy and are permitted to drink intoxicating beverages). The Nepali presence in the northeastern region has a long history and their role in its unification, development, and reconstruction has been crucial. It is claimed that the ancient Pragjyotish state was extended from Sunkosi (Subansri) in the east to Kushma (Kosi) in the west. Similarly, the ancient kingdom of Kamrup extends up to eastern Nepal.[10] Much later in the second decade of the sixteenth century the Coch king, Vishwa Singh, married Ratna Kanti Devi, a daughter of the Malla king of Kantipur (Kathmandu). It is claimed that the Coch king brought from Nepal to his kingdom a number of Brahmin priests, woodwork artisans, stone and metal sculptors and the pagoda-style temples. Similarly, Nildhwaj and Narnarain, the two Kamrup kings, were married in Nepal. Apart from

their consorts they brought to their kingdom Brahmin priests, Chhetri warriors, farmers, herdsmen, and artisans from Nepal and granted them rent-free land.[11]

It is claimed that mountain contingent from the Nepal hills fought on the British side at the battle of Plassey in 1757. That was one of the glorious periods of the Nepali history, as noted above, when Prithvi Narayan Shah was consolidating his Gorkha kingdom between the Sutlej and the Tista. He had a plan to attack the Coch and Ahom kings in collusion with Deb Judhir of Bhutan. The British intervention in the Coch-Bhutan dispute on behalf of the Coch and the subsequent removal of Deb Judhir from power temporarily contained the Gorkhas' eastward expansion. However, from 1780 to 1813 they raided Sikkim, and its southwestern part, known as Vijaypur Sikkim, came under Nepali control to the extent that the plains district of Rangpur in Bengal Presidency touched the Nepali and the Bhutanese territories in 1813. Ultimately, the Nepali ambitions clashed with the British, resulting in the present political boundaries of Nepal. The Indo-Nepal Treaty of Segowlee, 1815, stipulated that the territory east of Mechi river would be taken away from Nepal, and it was restored to Sikkim following the Treaty of Titalia. The British arm-twisting tactics with Sikkim for the next five decades and the Indo-Bhutan war of 1864 resulted in the creation of the British districts of Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, Kamrup, Goalpara, and Darang.

An 88,320 acre (or 138 square mile, area of Darjeeling with about 100 persons was acquired by the British in 1835 as the site for a health resort. The Sikkim Durbar used to get a revenue of about twenty rupees in those days, and this was handsomely compensated by the British, a point which was later contested by Hope Namgyal, the consort of the last ruler of Sikkim.[12] A few Lepcha, Limbu and Bhutia families inhabited the mountainous parts of the district. However, it is claimed that the annual revenue in 1845 from the Sikkimese Terai used to be about Rs. 50,000 to Rs. 55,000.[13] About a dozen headmen are named, who paid land revenue, cattle tax, timber royalty, pig tax, ferry duties on goods, and incomes from lawsuits in estate properties. By 1849, the revenue to the Sikkim Durbar had fallen to Rs. 15,878/12/6. The reason for the declining revenue was not lost sight of by the royal couple:

> In 1839, Darjeeling contained about a hundred *basti-wallahs* but within ten years more than 10,000 houses had settled there. People from all parts of the country flocked there. It having become a great market, the slaves and menial classes of Sikkim, Bhutan and Nepal—all took refuge there. The Sikkim people, not being aware of or used to the usages of powerful government, used to pursue their slaves and kidnap them back from Darjeeling. And the criminals from Darjeeling sought refuge in Sikkim. These things brought about an ill-will [between the British and Sikkim].[14]

The Nepalis were recruited to the British Indian army in a big way after 1815. They not only turned out to be a strong ally and mercenary force but also became pioneers of the British penetration into the eastern Himalayas. The British were engaged in developing the eastern Himalayan foothills for tea planting, an attractive proposition for the gregarious and thriving Nepalis. Moreover, in their efforts to contain the Bhutias of Sikkim and Bhutan and in a limited way even the tribes of the eastern frontiers, the British used the Nepalis as a wedge between themselves stationed in the plains and the indigenous people. Thus, they formed 34 per cent of the population of Darjeeling out of 94,712 in 1872, a proportion which had increased to more than 50 per cent of the total by 1901.[15]

Between 1869 and 1907 the population increased by about three times. According to the census of 1941, Nepal provided 45 per cent of foreign immigrants to India. According to the 1961 census the number of immigrants per 100 persons over the period 1931-61 averaged around 35 persons in the hill areas of Darjeeling. Needless to say, in the early period it was still higher.[16]

By the middle of 1980s more than 90 per cent of the population in the hill district of Darjeeling are claimed to be of Nepali origin. It appears that the Nepalis prefer grazing and farming in the hilly and forested areas. Their presence is noted by eloquent absence elsewhere in the tea growing districts, Darjeeling excepted. The Royal Commission on Labour in India, 1930 recorded that even in Jalpaiguri, the plains district with the highest number of Nepali tea plantation labourers, there was a decline of 30 per cent in the Nepali plantation force between 1911 and 1921. Possibly the Nepalis were lured to the adjoining northern Bhutan

as graziers and farmers, as Nepalis were migrating to southern Bhutan in considerable numbers in those days.

Even before the British emerged as the masters of Sikkim, there were Newar coin minters (*taksharis*) such as Laxmidhar and Chandrabir Pradhans, who were permitted to mine copper for coinage on behalf of the Durbar.[17] Sikkim effectively came under the British empire in 1889, when John C. White was appointed the Political Officer at Gangtok. White, an engineer by profession, took the job of infrastructural and economic development of his charge seriously. In his zeal for development he took the Nepalis under his wing at the cost of alienating even the royal couple. This appears to have been part of the British ethnic policy in the eastern Himalayas in the 1890s. Herbert Risley, the British scholar-administrator, wrote in 1894.

> The Lepchas are rapidly dying out; while from the west, the industrious Newars and Gorkhas of Nepal are pressing forward.... Here also religion will play a leading part. In Sikkim, as in India, Hinduism will assuredly cast out Buddhism, and the praying wheel of the Lama will give place to the sacrificial implements of the Brahmins. The land will follow the creed; the Tibetan proprietor will gradually be disposed and will be taken themselves to petty trade....[18]

However, within fifty years, the British ethnic policy in Sikkim changed completely. The new Indian Union was advised by the Political Officer to encourage Sikkim and Bhutan to distance themselves from India so that a new element of Buddhism should not be added to the existing Indian communalism.

The excerpt from Risley lays bare the British ethnic policy in Sikkim. Consequently, from 1891 to 1986 the Nepali population in Sikkim had increased phenomenally. With a view to creating a better future, they joined the movement for democratisation against the feudal anachronism. It was primarily a movement by the Nepali peasants led by semi-educated persons of lower middle class. Neither did they have any ideological sophistication nor organizational skill. They altogether lacked a sense of large political perspective. It was a confused movement against vague targets. Their slogans, symbols and programmes were largely irrelevant to the local situations. That is why when the Political

Officer to the independent India dismissed the first popular government in Sikkim in May 1949, the Sikkim State Congress leadership was thoroughly puzzled. This dismissal was, in the typical British colonial style, in utter disregard of the fact that the State Congress was practically the Sikkimese branch of the Indian National Congress, which was ruling India at that time. In the new situation, Sikkim meant the Maharaja of Sikkim, and not the people of Sikkim. Thus, the administration was once more handed over to the paternalistic care of the ICS officer who saw to it that the staggering feudal structure was strengthened at the cost of the democratic forces.

What resulted on the Sikkimese political scene came to be known as the democratic fraud of the parity formula, a concession to the feudal authority and deception of democracy to the people of Sikkim. The crown prince and later the last Chogyal, Palden Thondup, organized the Sikkim National Party, an antithesis of the State Congress. It is an open secret that in typical British colonial style, New Delhi encouraged the Durbar in its manoeuvring against the State Congress. No doubt it was a vulnerable movement because of its weak social base. In this way, what happened in Sikkim between 1973 and 1975 was neither an invasion nor a revolution. It was simply a matter of changed priority from New Delhi's point of view. The Chogyal had overplayed his limited role, gone beyond his brief, and was already nursing hopes of an international role and identity, which he never had. In the new dispensation, while the Lepcha-Bhutias were recognized as the scheduled tribes with twelve out of thirty-two elected seats in the State Assembly, the Nepalis felt cheated, as the rest of the unreserved seats were declared open to be contested by any Indian citizen. By then four-fifths of an estimated four lakh of the total Sikkimese population belonged to the Nepalis and another 30,000 stateless Nepalis were waiting for formal citizenship certificates. The Nepali leaders in Sikkim have been demanding reservation of the seats in the State Assembly for the Nepalis, recognition of Nepali as one of the Indian regional languages and granting of citizenship to the stateless Nepalis. Though these issues have been hanging fire for nearly a decade now, the state is ruled by the Nepalis and Nepali is one of the state languages of Sikkim. It is the only state of the Indian Union in which the language has been accorded such a privilege.

Nepali sources claim that the Dharmaraja Namgyal settled some Nepalis in the Dalimkote region of Bhutan in the seventeenth century.[19] However, the effective Nepali colonization of Bhutan started with the Indo-Bhutanese war of 1864. It was the Zungta Kazi and Ha Dzongpen, the effective ruler of western Bhutan, who invited the industrious and sturdy Nepalis to clear the difficult Duars with British encouragement. Charles A. Bell, the settlement officer in Kalimpong, provided statistics on 500 square miles of western Bhutan in 1904.[20] According to him, the Siphchu and Sangbe Kazis had 750 and 50 houses of the Nepalis under their respective controls. The three Nepali *thikadars*—the contractual settlers—Nandlal Chhetri, Garajman Gurung, and Lalsing Gurung, could count 800, 1000, and 130 houses of the Nepalis in their command. Bell worked out a population of 15,000 Nepalis in the region calculated at the rate of 5.5 persons per house; an apparent underestimate, because the native Bhutanese families were always smaller than those of the Nepalis. He found the Nepalis under oppressive Bhutanese control and even then he identified four reasons for immigration. First, the land was much more abundant in Bhutan than in the adjoining British territory. Secondly, tenants in Bhutan could cultivate any unoccupied land and burn the jungle as they pleased. In fact, in view of the backward state of cultivation the situation was much appreciated by the Bhutanese authorities although extensive forests were exposed to wanton burning and grazing. Thirdly, they could brew all kinds of liquor without restriction both for their consumption and for sale. And lastly, they could cut wood wherever they desired, as there were no reserve forests in Bhutan.

Some three decades after Bell's survey, Capt. J. Morris undertook an extensive tour of southern Bhutanese districts to assess the possibilities for Nepali recruitment to the Assam Rifles stationed at Shillong. He worked out a rough estimate of about 5,494 Nepali houses from the places he could visit. However, he could not visit all areas of Bhutan, such as Siphchu, which was inhabited by the Nepalis. Thus, he estimated an approximate 6,000 Nepali houses and worked out a population of about 60,000 at the rate of ten persons per family. However, he had good reasons to believe that the correct population figure of the Nepalis in Bhutan was considerably more than the estimate. The Bhutanese system of taxation encouraged large immigrant families, as land rent was levied on each house, not on the family. Estimating

the population of Bhutan as 300,000, he found more than 20 per cent of the total to be Nepalis.[21]

There has been no formal census in Bhutan, though the authorities occasionally claim to provide the latest population figures of the country. The latest official population of Bhutan was claimed to be 1,165,000 in 1981 distributed over eighteen districts. The Nepali immigrants are huddled in large settlements, unlike their indigenous northern neighbours, in three south Bhutanese districts. Though the state does not provide an ethnic breakdown of the population figures, it is claimed officially that 15 per cent of the total Bhutanese are from Nepal. The Nepalis, settled as peasants in large villages, provide almost the entire urban-industrial unskilled labour force of the country. They claim to contribute at least 60 per cent of the total population of Bhutan. One may safely say that while the official population figure is patently underestimated, the Nepali claim is equally wild. On balance it would be fair to estimate at least one-third of the total population of twelve lakh Bhutanese to be of Nepali origin.

The Nepalis on the Eastern Frontiers

'There is a hill; send up a Gorkha' is more appropriate in the context of the seven states of the North-Eastern Council.[22] The first direct contact between the Nepalis and this region appears to have occurred in 1817, when 1,000 Hindustanis and Gorkhas took part in the Sylhet operation as part of the Cuttack Legion (later known as the Assam Light Infantry).[23] It is claimed that one Subedar Jaichand Thakur, retired from the Eighth Gorkha Platoon, Sylhet, got settled as early as 1824 at Shillong. He is credited to have built a Radha Krishna temple at the place of his residence.[24] Some four decades after that Thurnton records in his memoirs that an irregular corps of the Sylhet Light Infantry consisting mainly of Gorkhas was stationed at Jowai in the Jaintia Hills during the 1862 rebellion.[25] The Nepali presence was such that even before the capital of Assam was shifted of Shillong Thurnton found, in 1867, that 'an excellent cricket ground had been formed on the smooth and level floor of a valley ... and cricket was played several times a week.... The Gorkhas are very fond of games like cricket and football and sometimes excelled in them'.[26]

The story of Nepali involvement in the consolidation of the region

under the British empire is ably presented through the pages of Col. Shakespear's *History of the Assam Rifles* (1977). Whether it was Sylhet or the Shillong plateau, Naga Hills or Lushai Hills, Chittagong Hill tracts or Sadiya Frontier tracts, the Bhutan wars or the Manipur rebellion, the Gorkhas constituted half the Assam Rifles and were always there in operation. Their important role in the Assam Rifles was recognized as early as 1865, when the Nepali *khukuri* replaced the short sword, which had impeded their progress through the jungle.[27] It may be appropriate to inform the readers that in the course of time the crossed *khukuri* was accepted as the emblem of the Assam Rifles, the custodians of the security of the region.

The Gorkhas could perform any odd and sundry job, including specialised jobs, assigned to them. Col. Shakespear records an incident revealing the versality of the Gorkhas. It was during the Surma Valley expedition in 1871, recorded by Lord F. Roberts, the senior Staff Officer. To begin the construction of the first bridge

> he sent for the Sapper Officer.... It would take time, the Officer said, as he first had to calculate the force of the current, weight to be borne by the bridge, strength of the timber required etc. He left to make his calculations and plans, and some of the Frontier Police came up to Lord Roberts to ask if he needed a bridge there. On hearing this was the case, the men, together with some Gorkhas of the 42nd ALI (Assam Light Infantry), set to at once, some felling bamboos and trees, others cutting them to required length, while others waded to their chest in the stream and drove uprights into the river bed, to which the bamboo flooring was then rapidly attached. The bridge was completed in a rough but efficient way, and was being tested by marching men over it before the Sapper Officer returned with all his calculations ready to begin his work. His surprise at seeing this unscientific but practical method of bridging can be imagined, and matters of this nature were henceforth left to those better acquainted with such work in this country.[28]

L.S.S. O'Malley, the editor of the Bengal District Gazetteers, echoed this spirit when he recorded that the Nepalis 'are a capable, cheerful and alert people, and are essentially a virile race. Though quick tempered

and keen to resent an injustice, they are remarkably willing, and loyal, if treated with consideration... Though small in stature, these Nepalis have big hearts.... Naturally vigorous, excitable and aggressive, they are very law abiding.'[29] This was also testified in an intelligence report on the official account of the Abor Expedition of 1911-12:

> The greater part of the striking force consisted of Gorkhas. The latter is to great extent a savage himself and remarkably well able to look after himself in the jungle, if he is encouraged to use his own initiative, and this instinct coupled with the fact that he has been trained to think makes him quite able to cope with almost any jungle man.[30]

Half of the fighting force and carrier coolies on this expedition were Nepalis.

Besides the Assam Rifles, the Gorkha Training Centre and various battalions of the armed forces were stationed at and around the district towns and strategic locations on the hills. After their release from service, a number of Gorkhas settled down around these places. Besides the other agencies, the Assam Rifles alone has rehabilitated its Gorkha ex-soldiers on at least 40 sites numbering as many as three thousand individuals. Some of the sites such as Sadiya in Assam, Mantripokhari in Manipur, Aizawl in Mizoram and Mokokchung in Nagaland are as old as a hundred years. Of such sites, Assam alone has thirteen, Manipur eight, Mizoram and Nagaland seven each. Arunachal Pradesh three and Meghalaya and Tripura one each. These are predominantly Nepali settlements, though there may be a smattering of others. Most of these residents have adapted themselves to the local situation in such a way that they are counted among the indigenous people with all the benefits, even though they have their own communities and their own way of life, speak their language and maintain their own traditions. But the Nepalis have a great capacity to assimilate themselves with the hill communities. They adopt the languages of their neighbourhood, contract marital alliances, and turn out to be an inseparable part of the local economy. In the Mon and Ao areas they have been adopted as members of the tribal communities where they are counted as legally indigenous people and secure the amenities to which the hill tribes are constitutionally entitled. It is said that a former Chief Minister of Nagaland is heavily dependent on the Nepali electorate of his consti-

tuency from Mokokchung. So much so that his father, who was an interpreter (*Dobhasi*) in the British days, had adopted a Nepali as his son in accordance with Ao tradition. This adopted Nepali brother of the leader is claimed to be his right hand man in matters of political support.

The Nepali ex-soldiers were encouraged to settle down in the foothills, forest fringes and in other strategic points on the frontiers. In this way certain compact pockets of Nepali settlements in Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Nagaland, and Manipur emerged. These new settlers, with their peasant background and the discipline of their strict military training, acquired an image as loyal citizens with pro-establishment attitudes towards the government. With their hard work, perseverance and investment of their pensions in agriculture, they have been able to turn out their newly acquired settlements as thriving centres of prosperous peasantry. Their apparent and visible prosperity among the relatively indolent and less achievement-oriented indigenous communities attracts jealousies. There is another aspect of the ex-soldiers' presence in the region. A number of settlements is located in areas where there is considerable movement of armed forces to contain secessionist and extremist activities. The Nepali ex-soldiers are accused of providing information on strategy and logistics to the armed forces. In such a situation, the Nepalis at times suffer at the hands of the local insurgent groups. That is exactly what happened in April 1980 in the Sagomong area in the Sadar sub-division of the Manipur Central District, when the suspected insurgents burned several Nepali villages.[31]

As far as the plains from the Bengal Duars to the Barak Valley are concerned, in terms of Nepali settlement, a distinct trend may be noted. The less skilful and marginal farmers and pastoralists turned to pastoral grazing on the hilly and forested tracts of the region. The Nepali herdsmen and marginal farmers trickled down to Assam at least from the first quarter of the present century. The Chief Secretary to the Government of Assam informed the Foreign Secretary to the Government of India on 13 May 1930 that:

> The greater number of the numerous Nepali graziers in Assam are Jaisis and Upadhyay Brahmins or Chhetris of non-martial classes. Some of the Gorkhalis of the fighting classes, who have served in the Gorkha regiments in the Assam

> Rifles, settled down in Assam when they leave the service. During the cold weather many Gorkhalis of martial castes, Rais, Limbus, come to work as sawyers in the Assam forests. Very few of them, however, settle down permanently in Assam.... The immigration of the Nepalis into Assam may be described as an administrative nuisance rather than a political menace.

He adds that: 'As the province of Assam develops, the proclivities of the Nepali immigrants for illicit distillation, poaching and avoiding payment of the government revenue will be defeated.'[32]

Within a decade or so the situation changed. J.H. Hutton initiated a policy to remove the Nepali settlers from the Naga Hills on economic and not political considerations. In his view, the Nepalis breed very fast and they would soon be eating up tracts of land in the hills badly needed by the Nagas, already themselves short of land.[33] Furthermore, an Intelligence Officer cautioned the government:

> That there has been great infiltration of Nepalis eastwards from Nepal is very true and very noticeable. It is impossible for any body who has lived in Assam, as I have for the last 16 years, not to have noticed the remarkable number of Nepalis that one sees all over the province, particularly in the Assam valley, the hill districts and the frontier tracts.[34]

In this context, the agrarian activities of the Nepalis in the Karbi Anglong and Khasi Hills districts may be referred to as representative cases. The district gazetteer records that the Nepalis for the most part were graziers, who keep large herds of cows and buffaloes. They have penetrated deep into the interior of the district and have established *khunties* (herdsmen's temporary sheds). Some of them have taken to cultivation also.[35]

The Nepali herdsmen and farmers move out of Nepal or its immediate eastern neighbouring Indian districts in search of new opportunities alone or sometimes in small groups of unskilled labourers. The only capital he carries with himself are his personal qualities as a cheerful, perseverant and sturdy hand, his ubiquitous *khukuri* and a readiness to do anything to make a living. With this temperament, he easily combines

a number of roles in himself as a dairyman, sharecropper, landless labourer, porter, smith, carpenter and even errand boy. When he comes to the eastern hill tracts, he invariably locates himself away from the tribal village on an uninhabited, possibly barren, forest fringe. Often he is guilty of felling forest trees, grazing and even clandestine settlements on the reserve forests.

With his frugal habits, perseverance, and industriousness he makes a difficult living for himself to begin with. His role in the local economy within no time turns out to be significant, because of his availability for any type of agricultural chores. The lonely porter of yesterday begins to be locally identified. He too feels comfortable enough to realize his physical, psychological, and social needs. His cosmopolitan social outlook, relative freedom from restrictions of purity and pollution in terms of food and drink and the prevalence of polygyny enable him easily to acquire a female partner. The number of wives a Nepali may have increases his productive capabilities not only biologically, but also in economic terms. In many cases, it has been found that larger the family of the Nepali the more prosperous it is. An administrator with about four decades of experience in the region came to the same conclusion. 'The Nepalis ... are phenomenally fertile people, and it is not unusual to find among them families where there are four or five wives and twenty to thirty children.'[36]

Besides the ex-soldiers and the marginal farmer-graziers, there are artisans and semi-skilled professionals and a newly emerging category of white-collar employees among the Nepalis of the region. In the urban centres of the region, where caste-bound professional specialist artisans are non-existent, the Nepalis have been able to fill the role of intermediary semi-skilled professionals between the unskilled local and highly sophisticated professionals from other parts of India. The types of work in which the urban Nepalis are engaged are new to the region. Thus there is little competition from the local indigenous communities, and unlike the rural ex-soldier and farmer Nepalis, they rarely come into conflict with the local community. The urban Nepalis lead a near-cosmopolitan life in which their expenses are in tune with their income. Being a Nepali does not help a semi-skilled professional, who thus maintains a submerged identity and joins his Hindu, Buddhist, or Christian neighbours for social, cultural, and religious celebrations. The

newly emerged white-collar Nepalis, on the other hand, are born, brought up, and educated in the region, speak the local dominant languages besides their mother tongue and remember the sufferings of their fathers. They are politically aware and culturally conscious of their status in the region and the Indian Union as citizens. As they compete for the scarce white-collar jobs with indigenous communities, for whom the positions are reserved in accordance with the law of the land, the educated Nepali aspirants are unconsciously made aware that they do not belong to the dominant local community. What else can they do but fall back upon the Gorkha past, Hindu traditionalism, and pan-Nepali solidarity as the panacea?

The Nepali demographic claim in Assam has always been exaggerated.[37] There were only 1.9 per cent Nepali speakers in Assam according to the 1961 census. This figure went up to 2.3 per cent in 1971. The Nepali language ranked as the fifth major language of the state. With the exception of plains districts (such as Goalpara, Kamrup, Nowgaon, and Cachar), approximately every fifteenth Assamese is a Nepali in the hill districts (Darrang 5.05%, Dibrugarh 11.05%, Karbi Anglong 6.43%, Sibsagar 2.05% and N.C. Hills 6.17%).[38] While the decennial growth rate between 1961 and 1971 for Assam was 34.95 per cent, for the Nepalis in Assam it turned out to be 48 per cent. Keeping this in view, an estimated number of the Nepalis in the region inclusive of Sikkim, Bhutan, and North Bengal may be anything between three and three & a half million. One may be reminded of the demand in the 1940s of the All India Gorkha League for in inclusion of North Bengal in Assam; and later, in the confusing situation of the British withdrawal from India and partition of the country, of their claim made to integrate Nepali-speaking Darjeeling, Sikkim, and Jalpaiguri with Nepal, a proposal endorsed by H.S. Suhrawardy, the Muslim League Premier of Bengal.[39]

The Conflicting Identities and the Dilemma of the Indian Nepalis

The Nepalis are proud of their history, culture, religion, language and traditions. In their exuberance they naturally draw on the experiences of their perennial source, Nepal. Nepal is the only Hindu monarchy in the world, and maintained a shadowy sovereignty even during the British days. The ancestors of the Nepali ruling oligarchy claim to have

successfully fought the Mughal emperors, and conventional Nepalis still refer to India as Mughlan. As orthodox Hindus, Nepalis share the same traditions with their Indian counterparts-scriptures, legendary and mythological heritage, sacred shrines and places of pilgrimage, language and script, and a host of other folk traditions. The Nepalis, proud of their Nepali identity, naturally consider the average Indian (Hindu) to be familiar and not dissimilar to themselves. Before the present Indo-Nepal boundaries were recognized as such, an average Nepali was vaguely aware of his existence and could cross and re-cross them for multifarious activities, which was considered normal. The Nepali kings, who believe that their forefathers emigrated to Nepal from Rajasthan, had been contracting marital alliances from among the Indian princely states. The common Nepalis, subjects of the king and loyal to the royal family, automatically feel related to the common people of these ex-princely states from which their nobility brought their consorts. In their heart of hearts, the Nepalis know that they do not belong to the Indian core. However, they are equally certain that from a cultural, religious, historical, and over-all traditional standpoint they are as good associates of the Indian core Gujaratis, Keralites or Maharashtrians. Obviously, from the historical, cultural, religious, and even geographical perspectives, Nepal is an associate to the Indian core.

The Indian core, it appears, accords Nepal a peripheral and not an associate status. Religious, cultural, and historical similarities provide an irritant between the two. For example, Nepal claims to be the only Hindu state in the world while predominantly Hindu India is a secular state. The Nepali insistence on its cultural distinctiveness from India does not provide enough scope to chart out the course of affinity. Similarly, the Nepali historical claim to maintain an equal distance between India and China (Tibet as well) makes the Indian core reluctant to accept it. The Nepali dress, food habits, caste structure, and commensality, an admixture of Buddhism even in Nepali Hinduism, and a host of similar claims blur the common original heritage of the two. As a sovereign state, Nepal figures in the Indian mainstream as a formal entity, which does not materially affect normal behavioural patterns and vital interests. Thus, Nepal, in spite of its historical, cultural, religious, and geographical proximity remains on the periphery of the Indian mainstream. The Nepalis—the immigrants from Nepal and those who were born and brought up in India—are accorded the same status as a

peripheral community. This differential identification creates a host of problems that remain unresolved.

The actual status of the Nepalis, a large immigrant community from another sovereign state, has to be determined. How do they belong to the Indian commonwealth of cultures and religions? In what ways do their history, culture, language, and traditions become Indian? Will the efforts of the Nepalis to seek an Indian identity be construed as the extension of the genuine policies, programmes, and traditions of Nepal? What will be the economic cost and political implications of the transformation of the Nepalis into Indians? Might not the Hindu identity claimed by the Nepalis and the Indian secular political culture lead to a possible conflict of values? What will happen to those Nepalis who possess multiple citizenship as Nepali, Bhutanese, and Indian? The Nepalis, unlike the Indians, have access to Tibet. Will the acceptance of the Nepalis as Indians in such a situation affect the Indian defence interest?

Before one tries to answer the above issues, one must be honest to accept certain reservations in India about Nepali credentials. The leaders of the Indian freedom movement identified the Nepalis as faithful allies of the British and, even worse for the Nepalis, they were popularly known as British mercenaries. There is plenty of evidence to show that the Nepalis took sides with the British. Jung Bahadur Rana's march to Gorakhpur to help the British in the 1857 rebellion and the posting of Gorkhas by the British to contain the Congress agitators on various occasions during the British rule are two examples. However, two points must be made here. First, the Nepalis were not the only ones to be used by the British in such a way. Secondly, the Nepalis did contribute in the integration, consolidation, development, and reconstruction of the Indian state, especially the Northeastern states, a point which should not be forgotten.

Thirdly, the issue of the Indian Nepalis is intricately linked with the problems of the immigrant Indians in Nepal. Over at least the last 200 years, the Nepali rulers encouraged the land-hungry peasants from the Gangetic plains to clear the hot, humid, malarial, and 'negative' *terai* forest. While the hillmen from the interior and the east of Nepal were migrating eastwards to India, the *deswalis* were engaged in turning the negative *terai* into the most prosperous economic bastion of Nepal. It

is also a fact that the *deswalis* (Indian) and *paharis* (Nepalis) fought shoulder to shoulder against feudal tyranny. Both have their kinsmen across the border and share a common cultural and religious tradition. Moreover, the privileged among them were educated at Varanasi, Patna, Calcutta, and Lucknow and saw little difference between Hindi and Nepali, which are both written in the same Devanagri script. Since 1960 resurgent ('rising' as they call it) Nepal has changed its priorities. Instead of a common heritage of culture, religion and history, she emphasizes her distinct identity. In such a situation, the immigrant Indians are not only no more welcome, but they are suspected of carrying 'the democratic germs' to the monolithic Panchayat system of Nepal. On the other hand, Nepal considers herself the natural custodian of the larger Nepali interests. And that is why voices are raised against real and putative problems of the Nepali immigrants in the northeastern frontiers of India.

The Bhutias in Sikkim, the Bengalis in West Bengal and the Khasis in Meghalaya invariably inform their visitors that most of the Nepalis have multiple identities—Nepali, Bhutanese and Indian. Many of them are reported to have immovable property and voting rights in Nepal. It is said that Nepali politics in India is not autonomous. Worst of all, it is alleged that the Nepalis are either passing information to, or taking orders from, Nepal. And that, it is claimed, is one of the reasons why no Indian Nepali has risen to national stature in Indian politics during the past four decades. This atmosphere of suspicion and past reservations has to be changed into something positive. As Indians, perhaps we have to ask ourselves how far the genuine aspirations of the Nepalis have been accommodated in the body politic of India.

The Indian states were carved out on the principles of language, ethnicity, and regional historical peculiarities. The Nepali claim for their territorial aspirations are not new and they should not be lightly brushed aside. However, too much reliance on historical background may lead one to draw the wrong conclusions. Since the indigenous communities on the eastern frontier region, such as Lepcha, Bhutia and other scheduled tribes, have been properly accommodated in the Indian framework, it is now the turn of the Nepalis. For their part, they must not leave any scope for anybody to suspect their credentials as Indians. As the dominant ethnic group in Sikkim and Darjeeling they must

demonstrate their political maturity, eschew violence, rise above immediate and parochial issues, and integrate themselves into the national political structure. But much greater responsibility lies with the Indian mainstream. Some positive and sincere efforts must be made to acknowledge the Nepalis' role in the body politic of India.

Notes

1. R. Strassold, "Centre-Periphery and System-Boundary" in *Centre and Periphery*, J. Goatmann (ed.), 1980, London.
2. E. Shils, "Centre and Periphery" in *The Logic of Personal Knowledge: Essays Presented to Michael Polanyi on his Birthday*, 1961, London.
3. The word 'Hindu' denotes a joint family of different faiths, different problems.... It is evolved out of the heterogeneous ways of life of hundreds of tribes and communities that lived in India for ages. This form of Hinduism is a multi-centred, decentralised structure formation of the ways of life of all those people. Of course, the central norms of Hinduism are represented by the beliefs and thoughts of the Indo-Aryan groups because of the dominating role of those people in the making of Indian history. But influences of the non-Aryan communities should not be minimized. Thus, while peripheral beliefs will have no place in the religious books of the Hindus, some of these beliefs will certainly be part of Hindu practice. S.S. Barling, "Four Phases of Hinduism", paper presented at the seminar on *Historical and Contemporary Character of Hinduism* at Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, Teen Murty House, 1986, Delhi, pp. 1-2.
4. S.K. Chaube, "Cultural Frame and the Dynamics of Federalism in India" in *Social Science Probings*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 1984, pp. 235-37.
5. J. Pemble, *The Invasion of Nepal: John Company at War*, 1971, Oxford, p. 1.
6. A.C. Sinha, *Politics of Sikkim*, Faridabad, 1975, p. 7.
7. C. Rosser, "Social Mobility in the Newar Caste System" in *Caste and Kin in Nepal, India and Ceylon*, C. Von Fürer-Haimendorf (ed.), 1966 (reprinted 1978), New Delhi.
8. F.H. Gaige, *Regionalism and National Unity in Nepal*, Delhi, 1975; A.C. Sinha, *Studies in Himalayan Communities*, New Delhi, 1984, p. 86.
9. A.C. Sinha, *Politics of Sikkim*, Faridabad, 1975, p. 8.
10. B.D. Dungel, "The History of the Nepali Communities in North East India", *Sakhari Samiksha* (Nepali monthly magazine), December 1983–June 1984, Shillong. Amanatullah, *Cooch Behari Itihas*, 1936.
11. B.D. Dungel, *op. cit.*
12. Hope Namgyal, "The Sikkimese Theory of Land-Holding and the Darjeeling Grant", *Bulletin of Tibetology*, Vol. III, No. 2, 1966.
13. Thutob Namgyal and Yeshe Drolma, *The History of Sikkim*, Translated from the Tibetan by Kazi Dawa Samdup, M.S., 1908.
14. *Ibid.*
15. L.S.S. O'Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteer, Darjeeling*, New Delhi, 1985, p. 41.

CHAPTER 2

The Nepalis in Northeast India: Political Aspirations and Ethnicity*

T.B. Subba

Introduction

A significant feature of northeast India is the ubiquitous presence of a loose confederation of peoples generally known as "Nepalis" and/or "Gorkhas". Settled in the hills and valleys, towns and villages of this region, they initially came as construction workers, tea and mining labourers, and military personnel to fit into the colonial designs of the British. Little did they know then that they would later become an eyesore of the local peoples, tribal or non-tribal. Today, their national status in the region is often treated at par with the illegal immigrants from Bangladesh and few Indians, including the Nepalis themselves, seem to be aware of the Indo-Nepal Peace and Friendship Treaty of 1950, which legalises their immigration to India as it does so about Indian emigrants to Nepal. But they are sweepingly bracketed as "foreigners", which is unfortunate, and are forcefully driven out of the region or harassed in the slightest pretext and sometimes even killed.

One reason why such incidents occur is the fact that the local peoples are scarcely aware of the history, society, and culture of the Nepalis. Writings on them are very few and far between. Srikant Dutt (1981) was perhaps one of the first to write on them in a national journal. He was followed by A.C. Sinha (1982, 1990). But these writings are not easily accessible to peoples here and do not adequately reflect the perceptions of the Nepalis. The few Nepali scholars from this region

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have written mostly in the Nepali language and confined themselves to their respective states (see, for instance, Mishra 1987, Rai 1987). Sumanraj Timsina's work (1992) based on his M.Phil dissertation devotes some pages on the northeastern Nepalis also but his main objective was to trace the evolution of the Gorkhaland movement in West Bengal. Scholars from Nepal would probably have done some work in this region but for the Restricted Area Permit system it has not been possible so far. Efforts made by the faculty members of the Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies, Tribhuwan University, are reported to have been forestalled by Indian authorities. And my own study has been mostly confined to Darjeeling and Sikkim (1989).

It may be added here that the region called "northeast" has today acquired a distinct identity with Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, and Tripura as the constituent units commonly benefacted by the North Eastern Council. Scholars like Dutt (1981) and Sinha (1982, 1990) seem to have refused to be bound by this political delimitation of the "northeast" and considered appropriate to discuss Darjeeling, Sikkim, and even Bhutan within the purview of this region. This cultural definition does not, however, seem to be widely accepted. The overtures of Sikkim to be refuged under the North Eastern Council have not been reciprocated and instead there are strong reservations against such a proposal from certain quarters here. For the purpose of this paper, I have thus confined myself to the political jurisdiction of this region.

My objective in this chapter is limited—to introduce the Nepalis of northeast India conceptually, historically, demographically, and politically. This, I hope, will dispel the misconceptions of many people including fellow academicians.

Nepali Versus Nepalese

One may wonder what 'Nepali *versus* Nepalese' is all about when there is apparently a much greater controversy about Nepali *versus* Gorkhas. The latter may be politically more significant but conceptually the former is perhaps more important. Originally used in the 1950s by Late Ramkrishna Sharma, an All India Gorkha League (AIGL) leader and ex-judge of the Calcutta High Court and reiterated in late 80s by Subhas Ghisingh, the president of Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF),

to distinguish the Indian Nepalis from those of Nepal, the word "Gorkha", however, could not compete with "Nepali" though both the words refer to the same conglomeration of peoples.

The word "Nepali" is conceptually broader than the word "Nepalese" in the sense that the former represents a culturo-linguistic denomination while the latter restricts its meaning to the language and people of Nepal. The use of the suffix "ese" in English refers to, according to *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, the "names of foreign countries and towns meaning (inhabitants or language) of". Thus, if someone in India writes "Nepalese", unless unknowingly, it refers to the language or inhabitant of Nepal, which is probably not the sense in which Dutt, Sinha, and a host of other Nepali writers like Dungel (1983) have used this word. This use is incorrect but perhaps inadvertent.

The empirical situation in the northeast shows that there are many 'Nepalese' here who cannot be differentiated from Indian Nepalis. While even the Nepalese have the right to free movement and ownership of property in India, under the 1950 Treaty some of them have acquired even political rights. But if because of this every Indian Nepali is treated as a Nepalese or a citizen of Nepal, as often witnessed in India, the sentiments of genuine Indian Nepalis would naturally be hurt. This problem is not likely to be resolved easily and a simple replacement of the word "Nepali" by "Gorkha", as argued by the GNLF president, is not definitely going to help this crisis.

Who are Nepalis?

Despite more than two centuries of political consolidation of Nepal if any one there is asked about his/her identity one will invariably come across the name of an ethnic group or community. S/he will say Newar, Rai, Limbu, Mangar, Gurung, Chhetri, or Bahun but never a Nepali. S/he transcends this identity as soon as s/he goes out of Nepal and becomes a "Nepali" to others not only because others understand this identity but also because s/he feels more secure to be identified so. A Newar may not come across another Newar, or a Gurung another Gurung but s/he does certainly come across another Nepali. This grants some kind of security to him/her. On the other hand, introducing oneself as a Newar or a Gurung will, for Indian Nepalis as well as Nepalese, encounter queer responses.

Thus, it is the etic situation that brings a large number of historically, racially, culturally, linguistically, and religiously divergent groups under a common identity called "Nepali" or "Gorkha". Whether he is a Bahun or a Kami makes no difference to a Naga as it does not matter whether he is an Ao or a Sema to a Nepali. But since the diversity within the so-called Nepalis is multiple, it is necessary here to briefly discuss the fabric of the Nepali society. This is first summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Socio-cultural fabric of the Nepalis

History	Caste	Race	Language	Religion	Number
Emigrants					
Bahun, Thakuri, Chhetri	High	Caucasoid	Indo-Aryan	Hindu	20% Approx.
Kami, Sarki, Damal	Low				
Immigrants					
Newar				Hindu/Buddhist	
Tamang, Sherpa, Yolmu	Middle	Mongoloid	Tibeto-Burmese	Buddhist	80%
Limbu, Rai, Yakha, Mangar, Gurung				Tribal/Animist	

The above Table indicates, first of all, that many Nepali castes are of Indian origin. They had emigrated to Nepal during the fourteenth century when the Muslim power was on the rise in India (Bista, 1980: 2; Sharma, 1982: 81-82). They may be better called 'return migrants' rather than 'immigrants'. The second group consists of those who were there in Nepal at the time of the emigration of the first group members there. Of the various castes included in this group, the Limbus are also known to be one of the earliest inhabitants of Darjeeling and Sikkim.

The division of Nepalis in three caste groups—high, middle, and

low—is rather crude because there are hierarchical differences within the first two groups and sometimes even within a caste. For instance, the Bahuns rank at the top of the caste hierarchy, followed by Thakuris and Chhetris but within the Bahuns, the Upadhyayas rank above the Jaisis and only the former can perform priestly functions. In the middle caste group, the Newars have their own elaborate caste hierarchy while others have segmentary clan divisions with little or no regard for the principles of purity and pollution. (For details, see Subba 1989, Chapter III).

Racially, the Nepalis are divided into two broad groups, viz., Caucasoids and Mongoloids. Linguistically, the Caucasoids have no other language except the Indo-Aryan Nepali language, while the Mongoloids have a large number of Tibeto-Burman languages which are mutually unintelligible. Some of these languages like the Newari and the Limbu have their own scripts and distinct grammatical systems. The simultaneous use of these languages is still found in Nepal but outside it they have almost completely switched over to the Nepali language due to intermixed living and lack of adequate number of speakers living in a compact area. This has been possible only for the Limbus in West Sikkim where they have a significant concentration.

With regard to religion, a common misbelief held by many in India and elsewhere is that they are Hindus. Though it is difficult to define who a Hindu is, it is perhaps incorrect to consider all of them to be Hindus. In the strict sense, the actual Hindus are the members of the high and low caste groups only: the Tamangs, Sherpas, Yolmus (or Kagates), and a section of the Newars called Buddhamargi Newars are Buddhists while the religion of the Rai, Limbu, Yakha, Mangar, Gurung, etc. may be better called 'tribal' or 'animist'. In their religious system, Brahmin priests, temples, idol-worship, sacred texts, etc. have little or no significance. They have their own priests and own system of propitiating the God or gods and goddesses. Their religious beliefs and values are passed on from one generation to another orally, through certain specialists who become so not by learning or by birth but by the will of some supernatural beings. If their religion is called 'Hindu' all tribal religions of northeast India or elsewhere should perhaps be called so.

Finally, it is by and large agreed that the Caucasoid Hindus speaking

the Indo-Aryan Nepali language constitute approximately 20 per cent of the total Nepali population.

Migration to Northeast

It has been fairly established by now that Nepal had strong links with Assam from ancient times. The ancient Kamrup kingdom is, for instance, known to have its boundaries extended right up to eastern Nepal and in the 1520s the two Kamrup kings—Nildhwaj and Nara-narayan—had married the princesses of Nepal. Apart from such royal unions, Brahmin priests, Chhetri warriors, farmers, herdsmen, and artisans from Nepal were brought to Assam and given revenue-free land (Sinha, 1990: 222). Shyamraj Jaisi (1990) has added such instances in the historical study of the Nepalis in Assam.

But the real immigration of the Nepalis to northeast India began in early nineteenth century, in 1817 to be exact, when their first direct contact with the region took place with the deployment of the Gorkhas in the Sylhet Operation as a part of the Cuttack Legion to be later known as Assam Light Infantry (Sinha, 1990: 226-27). It was one Subedar Jaichand Thakur of the 8th Gurkha Rifles who settled in Shillong as early as 1824. Later, in 1867 also, Thurnton is quoted to have seen the Gorkhas playing cricket and football in Shillong (Sinha, 1990: 227). In this regard, the following extract from Sinha's article (1990: 228) is informative:

> Besides the Assam Rifles, the Gurkha training centre and various battalions of the armed forces were stationed at and around the district towns and strategic locations on the hills. After their release from service, a number of Gurkhas settled down around those places. Besides the other agencies, the Assam Rifles alone has rehabilitated its Gurkha soldiers on at least thirty-eight sites numbering as many as three thousand individuals. Some of the sites such as Sadiya in Assam, Mantripokhari in Manipur, Aizawl in Mizoram and Mokokchung in Nagaland are as old as a hundred years. Of such sites, Assam alone has thirteen, Manipur eight, Mizoram and Nagaland seven each, Arunachal Pradesh three and Meghalaya and Tripura one each. These are

> predominantly Nepalese settlements, though there may be a smattering of others.

The above extract not only provides an insight into the background of the Nepali settlements but also informs us about the places of their settlements in the northeast. With regard to the caste background of the Nepalis in this region, the report of the Chief Secretary to the Government of Assam dated 13 May 1930 says that "the greater number of the numerous Nepali graziers in Assam are Jaisis and Upadhyay Brahmins, or Chhetris of non-martial classes" (quoted in Sinha, 1990: 229).

What may be missed here by a casual reader is the fact that the graziers were socially a separate category from those who had settled there after release from their services. The caste backgrounds of this category of settlers were mainly Mangar, Gurung, Rai and Limbu and hardly any Brahmin or Chhetri, whose recruitment in the British army had lost their favour particularly after 1857 due to their alleged allegiance to Indian national movement even while in the service of the British army (Hodgson, 1874: 40).

Due to unavailability of relevant historical materials with me, I am not in a position here to provide any insight into those Nepalis who came here to work in the tea and sugarcane plantations, for road and railway lines constructions, and other such colonial purposes. What one gathers from Dutt's article is that "the Border Roads Organisation found Nepalese labour most suited and this process injected further numbers of Nepalese into the hill regions of northeast India as well as Bhutan" (1981: 1054). But I do not know how old is the immigration of such Nepalis to this region or what were there caste backgrounds.

Distribution of Nepalis in Northeast

There is perhaps no other tribe or community which is distributed all over the seven states of northeast India as the Nepalis are. In this regard, the position of the Nepalis here is indeed unique but, as the following table will show, there is no proper record of their population here.

The figures in the table are not entirely dependable, which is mainly due to the unstable political situation in the region for the past three decades or so. However, the demographic size of the Nepalis, whether

Table 2. Demography of the Nepalis in Northeast

States	1951	1961	1971	1976	1981
Arunachal Pradesh	NA	10,610 (25,000)	30,912 (85,000)	NA	45,508
Assam	101,335*	32,213 132,925*	252,673 353,673*	NA	NA
Manipur	(2860)	13,571	26,381	(36,604)	37,046
Meghalaya	NA	NA (6000)	44,445 (10,111)	NA	61,259
Mizoram	NA	NA (2000)	NA (4000)	NA	5983
Nagaland	NA	10,400	17,536	NA	24,918
Tripura	NA	1696	2107	NA	2190

Source: Timsina, 1992. Figures in brackets from Dutt, 1981 and figures in asterisks from Sinha, 1982.

taken together for the whole of northeast India or statewise, does not seem as alarming as it is often made out to be by some politicians. Their total percentage does not exceed 3 even in Assam where their population is believed to be the most numerous of all states in the region. As a matter of fact, their population in this state was considered so large that the All India Gorkha League in 1955 demanded the merging of Darjeeling with Assam and the Nepalis were a major target of the 1979 movement against "foreigners" spearheaded by the All Assam Students Union.

Political Aspirations and Ethnicity

In order to understand the political aspirations and ethnicity of the Nepalis in northeast India, it is desirable to understand how they identify themselves in India or in the region concerned. In this context, the following contention of Sinha is worth reproducing:

> But to our mind, the Nepalese in the northeast India in particular and in India in general, may identify themselves ideologically as the Nepalese sub-nationals against their Hindu and caste tribal identities. This is an empirical situation in which the most rewarding identity for them would be to follow the ethnic ideology so they could separate themselves from the overlapping traits with 'others' (e.g., the non-

> Nepalese) and restrict themselves to their distinctiveness (1982: 96-97).

This observation, though made by one of the authorities on the region, suffers from the following limitations. One, the Nepali identity as against Hindu, caste or tribal identities is there not because it is "rewarding", as he contends, but because it is a compulsion since no matter how they would like to be identified they are identified by others, including their Hindu, caste or tribal counterparts, as "Nepalese", which is proved to be more harmful than rewarding, particularly for the Indian Nepalis. Here I would like to cite a personal instance. Whenever I came to Shillong by bus I was asked to get down at Srirampur Hat and other check-posts at midnight and at Byrnihat check-post the next morning. The reason? I am a 'Nepalese'. I had to bribe the constables at least four times to let me through despite my showing the identity card and once even my passport. Who would like to get down in the middle of forest at mid-night? And who would listen to me when they even refused to see the identity cards?

Two, the boundaries of ethnic identity are seldom fixed and immutable. In fact, such boundaries wax and wane depending on the exigencies of time as seen in October 1992 when the Nepalis, Bengalis, and Biharis put up a joint front against the Khasis of Shillong.

Thirdly, there are plenty of instances to show that ever since the eve of Independence there has been concerted efforts by Indian Nepalis to give a separate identity to themselves from that of the Nepalese. The former category of Nepalis have often been humiliated and jeered at by their fellow countrymen by mistaking them to be Nepalese. It is precisely for this reason that Late Ramkrishna Sharma had pleaded for the use of the word "Gorkha" to represent the Indian Nepalis. It was also for the same reason that the GNLF president had emphasized on the use of the word "Gorkha" in lieu of "Nepali" and demanded the abrogation of the 1950 Treaty between Nepal and India, which he thought would jeopardise any such effort. Even those who did not support the GNLF view always admitted of this identity crisis and many have also suggested alternative identities for Indian Nepalis like "Bharatiya Nepali", "Bharpali", and "Bhargoli". Thus, the separation from the Nepalese has long been a major crisis of identity for Indian Nepalis, as it is for the Nepalese to be separated from Indian Nepalis in Nepal particularly in the last 10

years or so. The Indian Nepalis, particularly from Darjeeling, being allegedly superior in the English language and having better educational background, have surpassed the local Nepalese in hoteliering, tourism and trekking, and boarding school establishments in Nepal and thereby earned much jealousy of the Nepalese there. The Indian Nepalis are called "Prawasi", "Munglane", etc. with a feeling bordering on apathy. So what is often written in the Indian newspapers about the ill-treatment meted out to the "Indians of Nepalese origin" in Nepal is also true of the Nepalis of Indian origin in Nepal.

One of the reasons why Indians, particularly in the northeast, are sore about the Nepalis is the fact that they have been deployed first by the British and later by Indian governments for quelling various separatist or insurgent movements since the second decade of the last century till date. In this context, the following Table is worthwhile.

Table 3. Deployment of 8th Gorkha Rifles in the northeast

Place/Tribe	Year
Khasi	1827, 1835-36, 1847, 1861-62
Naga	1839, 1850-51, 1875, 1879-80, 1912-13
Mizo (Lushai)	1851, 1869-71, 1890
Jaintia Hills	1861-63
Garo Hills	1873
Dafla (Nishi)	1873
Mishmi	1881-82, 1899
Aka (Hrusso)	1883-84
Manipur	1891, 1944
Abor (Adi)	1893-94, 1911-12
Burma and Assam	1943-45

Source: Jaisi, 1990: 170-71.

On the top of such sustained deployment of the Nepalis in the northeast, it is reported that the Nepalese ex-soldiers are accused of providing data on strategy and logistics (of the insurgents) to the armed forces" (Sinha, 1982: 92). Hence, it is no wonder that there are numerous attacks on their life and properties. For instance, in 1967, about 8,000 Nepalis were driven out of Mizoram (Lal, 1968: 346); in 1978, about 200 houses of Nepalis were burnt in Nagaland and about

2000 Nepalis fled Manipur in 1980 (Sinha, 1982: 91-92), not to speak of the deportation of much larger numbers of Nepalis from Assam in 1979 and from Meghalaya in 1987 (Subba, 1992: 115-16).

It is also important to recall here the widespread belief of the Indians, though not completely unfounded, that the Nepalis served the British as 'mercenaries' in subduing the national movement in different parts of the country. While it is not meaningless to speculate on what would be the political boundaries of India if the British had failed to subdue the national movement in the beginning the fellow citizens need to be reminded again and again that many Nepalis had also participated in the national movement and were consequently imprisoned or sentenced to death (Jaisi, 1990: 105-51; Subba, 1992: 59).

Here I would like to add that it was mainly the high caste Nepalis who had participated in the national movement, which is not surprising in view of their Indian origin and close culturo-religious interaction with their counterparts in India during their stay in Nepal. But it should not be concluded from this that the middle and low caste members had a strong sense of Nepalese nationalism: their exploitation and suppression by the Nepalese high castes for so many centuries had totally alienated them from the same. It is a fact that the very state policies and Acts of Nepal were aimed at marginalizing them. That they did not participate in the national movement like the high caste members was also due to their large-scale engagement in the British army right from 1816 and their age-old reservation about rallying with the high caste members.

The participation in the nationalist movement is no bank balance to be encashed now for legitimising certain special rights and privileges. But some Indians often cite this as a pointer to the Nepalis' alleged lack of the sense of belonging to India. This is a dangerous gesture as it castigates even those who had sacrificed their lives and others who, for no fault of theirs, could not participate in the same. In any case, as Sinha rightly points out, "the Nepalese were not the only ones to be used by the British in such a way" (1990: 233).

But it is not so much the suspicion of Indians about Nepalis, which is responsible for many disabilities they suffer from as it is their numerical minority status, wherever they are settled, with the exception of Sikkim, which is accountable for the same. Their problems are not so much the problems of a people struggling for national identity as they are of

an unrecognised and often uncared for minority whose voice is seldom loud enough to be heard by those who allocate the development rewards. In the ultimate analysis, it appears that their organizations, wherever they are and whether cultural, literary, or political, seem to have the objective of achieving what others, mainly majority communities, have already achieved. Even their desire to be separated from the Nepalese seems to have been conditioned by their hope of more equitable distribution of the development rewards in their respective states.

Conclusion

The political aspirations of the Nepalis in northeast India are therefore woven around the struggle for equal economic and political rights as other Indian citizens. Such aspirations have often taken very long to be fulfilled or have remained unfulfilled even today. The most important reason for this is the lack of a strong ethnic solidarity among them. Their ethnicity is actually much weaker than what is made out to be. The historical, racial, cultural, spatial, and now, class and occupational, diversities have been successful in acting as a deterrent to the emergence of a strong ethnic solidarity among them. This could not emerge even in Darjeeling. Otherwise there would not occur so many fratricidal clashes and killings between the supporters of the GNLF and the Communist party of India (Marxist), and between the former and the Gorkha Volunteer Cell members (For details, see Subba 1992, Chapter VI).

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