IDENTITY FORMATION AND IDENTITY CRISIS: NEPALIS IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Nepalis in India have settled all across the physical perimeters of India in general, with a sizeable number having made Darjeeling hills and Sikkim their home. ‘Nepalis’ instead of Nepalese is used to define the Nepali community of India as Nepalese would directly connect them to the sovereign state of Nepal. The paper discusses the historical reasons for presence of Nepalis in India. And explains the evolution and growth of Nepali identity, how the identity evolved and grew over the several years. Moreover the paper will analyse how ethnic groups have submerged to develop a strong Nepali identity in India. While developing a strong Nepali identity in India, language and literature played a very important role. Lastly, the paper will discuss the issues concerned with Nepali identity. The section will explain how Colonial construction of Nepali identity had adverse effects on the community. And will further explain how Indian Nepalis despite being born in India are often treated at with the Nepalese citizens.

Keywords: Colonial, ethnic, identity, Indian Nepalis, Nepalese.
IDENTITY FORMATION AND IDENTITY CRISIS: NEPALIS IN INDIA

The Nepalese and the Indian Nepalis have been travelling and since time immemorial residing in different parts of India in pursuit of trade, pilgrimage, martial alliances, warriors and other variations. In the past, concepts of state boundaries and nationality were flexible enough to overlook the migrants.\(^1\) There are several reasons for such a significant human movement across the border. Firstly, the internal situation within Nepal made their lives of at least some of the subjects so difficult that they preferred to move out of the country.\(^2\) The consolidated Nepali state under Gorkha ruler Prithvi Narayan Shah in 1768 brought unexpected changes with regard to land and labour policies. The survival of people was in treat with the draconian policies adopted by the autocratic ruler, rural indebtedness and loss of land continued.\(^3\) Secondly, the migration increased tremendously with the introduction of tea plantation and Darjeeling Himalayan Railways. The Nepalese vegetating in economic stagnation in the Rana ruled Himalayan Kingdom started immigrating towards Darjeeling for better livelihood and economic well being.\(^4\) In 1876 number of tea employee was around 19000 and among them 90% were from hills of eastern Nepal. Third, major factor was the recruitment of Gorkha soldiers into the British Indian army after the Anglo-Nepalese war of 1814-16, over 4,500 Nepalese were enlisted in the army. As the British were not allowed to recruit inside Nepal, they encouraged Nepalese to settle outside their border.\(^5\) To some extent the decision of the British to make Darjeeling as a hill resort also gave opportunity to neighbouring people from Nepal to immigrate and take part in the development.\(^6\) According to T.B Subba, it is not entirely true to assume with regards to ethnic history of Darjeeling that Nepalese or Gorkhas have migrated from Nepal after mid-nineteenth century only. He says that historical evidence show that Nepali Bahuns (Brahmins) are known to have emigrated from various place in India like Rajputana, Kannauj, Chittore, Bengal, Mithila, Orrissa driving the rise of Muslim power in India.\(^7\) The Newaris (Newaris are the indigenous people of the Kathmandhu) too have a

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1 Darjeeling was granted to the British by Maharaja (King) of Sikkim in 1985. Nineteen year earlier after the Anglo-Nepalese war, all of the territory captured by the Gorkhali east of Mechi River now Nepal’s eastern border had been handed over to British.
7 Bahuns or Brahmins represents the highest of the four Hindu varna or castes.
strong Indian connection as they draw from Abhiras, Kiratas, Lichhavis and Karnataka.8

EVOLUTION AND GROWTH OF NEPALI/GORKHA IDENTITY

In the beginning of eighteenth century, the land between the valleys 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. In the middle of the eighteenth century, the Shah family of Gorkha, a small state in Chaubisi and alleged to be migrants from Chittor in Rajasthan, under their ruler Prithivi Narayan Shah emerged as a strong force. The Gorkha ruler acquired himself the title of the king of the hill by defeating the Malla ruler of Kathmandu in 1768 and ruler of Bhatgaon in 1769. The Gorkhas forces increased their territories and by 1815 they had control from Tista River in 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 Nepal turned out to be a nation of several tribes and castes, who claimed to be descendants of the original subject of the Gorkhas and who speak the language called Gorkhali or Nepali.9

According to T.B Subba, the first thing that should be noted about Gorkha identity is that there is no unanimity on the origin of the word Gorkha. For G. Jucci word originated from Goraksha which means protection of cow. And Suryabikram Jnawali traces its origin to khasa word garkha meaning revenue area. In the both the cases the word Gorkha is associated historically with the khasas from northern India. Prof. Subba says that with the establishment of the Gorkha dynasty in 1959 by Drabya Shah the word began to be referred to the inhabitants of the principality where the Gorkhas ruled. And he further says that the Gorkha identity in India was born in battlefields followed by their recruitment in British Indian army. It is important to noted that all the castes and tribes were not a part of military services but to a extent Gorkha soldiers and ex-military servicemen helped in shaping the identity.10 General Ochterlony and Brian Hodgson specially recommended recruiting the Gorkhas of Mongolian race after the War of 1814. British conception about the physical attributes of Nepalese then was Mongoloid with high cheek bones and typical fold covering the inner angle of the eye.

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8 T.B Subba, “The Gorkhaland Movement in West Bengal,” (2010), 291-292. The Abhiras were originally pastoral tribes from the lower Indus Valley, who migrated from eastward and southwards across Avanti which includes districts of western Madhya Pradesh and parts of Rajasthan. Kiratis are located in the northeastern and eastern part of Nepal and are Hindus, Buddhists or animists. They are traditionally hillmen, and ethnologically closer to the north eastern tribal region of India, and the Lichhavis were probably rajputs of India from today’s Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.


It was after the emergence of the All India Gorkha League in 1943 that the word Gorkha was absolved of its racial meaning. From than onwards the term Gorkha was used to define the entire community in general, so it was not used only for Khas or Aryan nepalis which was the case prior to 1814, but was used for Khasetar or Mongoloid Nepali as well. The word Nepali is used as a synonym of Gorkha word, though the appropriateness of use of one over the other has also been a debateable issue. Moreover, word Nepali is conceptually boarder than the word Nepalese, as the former represents a cultural-linguistic denomination while later restricts its meaning to the language and people of Nepal.

In Nepal both Nepali and Gorkha are used for official purposes, while the former is more popular as compared to the latter, and Gorkha and Nepalis are used as synonyms in India. The notification on citizenship dated August 23, 1988 recognizes the term Gorkha and not Nepali but again Sahitya Akademi recognises Nepali and not Gorkha. Nepali is recognised as official language in three subdivisions of Darjeeling by the West Bengal Official Language Act of 1961. The Calcutta centre Doordarshan telecasts Nepali programmes and not Gorkha and the University of North Bengal and Banaras Hindu University offers offer master’s degree and allow doctoral these in Nepali. Moreover the Nepali has been included in the eight Schedule of the Indian constitution. The use of term Gorkha has also been recognised by the both State and Centre government as two autonomous bodies were named Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (1998) and Gorkha Territorial Administration (2012).

WHY NO ETHNICITY AMONG NEPALIS OF INDIA?

Ethnicity is a sense of ethnic identity, as De Vos defines it as “consisting of the subjective, symbolic or emblematic use by a group of people...Of any aspect of culture, in order to differentiate themselves from other group.” The Gorkhas or Nepalis can be ethnically divided into three major types. First of its type are the Kiratis, this group of people are said to be the early inhabitants of the land, they are further divided into number of largely endogamous tribes namely Rai, Magar, Limbu, Lepcha, Tamang, etc and speak their own language. Second types are the Newaris, they are urban trading and commercial stock found in Kathmandhu valley and eastern Nepal. Newaris are also divided into number of castes among themselves and they have their own script, language, arts, crafts and architecture, are bilingual like Kiratis, but along with their native language they speak Nepali as well. Newaris are the enterprising community spread all over Kathmandu valley, eastern Nepal, Tibet, Darjeeling and north-eastern India. Thirdly, the last ethnic group are the Tagadharis, they are the Nepali counterpart of

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11 Ibid, 294
13 Subba, Ethnicity, State and Development: A Case Study of the Gorkhaland Movement in Darjeeling, 70.
Indian Hindus, with their concept of purity and pollution. They are inhabitants of Nepal; they mainly concentrated in the western and central region and Kathmandu valley. Among them, the Nepalis are divided into two groups, those who are entitled to sacred thread and those who are not. Bahuns, Chettris and Thakuris fall under the former group and the latter group consists of Kami, Damai and Sarki.

In Nepal ethnic and class are rigid marker of stratification but such scenario is not noticeable among Nepalis in India. The difference in ethnicity among the Nepali community in India and Nepal, can be attributed to the phenomenon where national identities shift into primary position for individuals in relation to ethnic, caste or racial identities. Moreover it can be also be attributed as a result of comparatively liberal attitudes towards mixed marriages within the Indian Nepali Community, though they maintain ethnic and caste names, almost inhabitants are linked with members of putatively distinct ethnic groups through kinship as well as through informal community relationship. Caste hierarchy is very strong in Nepal compared to Indian Nepalis. Both commensual and marital relation among the Indian Nepalis is influenced by secular values in education, occupation, status.

Even after two centuries of political consolidation of Nepal, if we ask anyone about their identity, we would generally get response in terms of their ethnic group. A person will say himself to be a Rai, Limbu, Gurung, Bahun, Kami or Pradhan, but this identity transcend outside Nepal, a person becomes a Nepali to others. T.B Subba says that this not only because others understand this identity but also because he/she feels more secure to be identified so. A Newar may not come across another Newar or a Gurung may not come across another Gurung, but he/she will certainly come across another Nepali. And introducing oneself as a Newar or a Gurung for Indian Nepalis will encounter queer responses says Subba. Consolidation of strong Nepali identity was demonstrated during the Gorkhaland movement in Darjeeling, slogans such as “Lepcha, Bhutia, Nepali- hami sabai Gorkhali (Lepcha, Bhutia, Nepali- we all are Gorkhas) were raised.”

The majority of Nepali emigrants who found the Diaspora community came from Tibeto-Burman group. Nepali language as their mother tongue was claimed by only 20% of the total population and the rest 80% of the total Nepali population in Darjeeling comprised of Rais, Magars, Kimbuls, Gurungs, Newars, Tamang and Sunwars. Hutt says that the Nepali language is the primary basis for Nepali ethnic identity outside Nepal. Apart from this insigma like kurki (short sized knife), dhaka topi (Nepali traditional cap) are often used as other means of self identification. Nepali was accepted as the ‘lingua franca’ by communities like Rai, Limbu, Gurung, Magar, Tamang...
(Murmi), Newar, Sunuwar, Thami, etc in Darjeeling, Sikkim and other parts of India which facilitated the development of collective consciousness of these peoples. It was not difficult for these groups of people living together in villages, towns and tea gardens to adopt Nepali as their lingua franca, in this context eminent historian Kumar Pradhan writes “The Numerous ethnic tribes like Rais, Limbus, Tamangs, Magars, Newars and Thamis living separately in their own villages and speaking their own languages in Nepal had no opportunity of living separately in the changed environment of Darjeeling. The migrants, who shared Nepali as the middle or second language with their primary Tibeto-Burman languages in their own homeland, adopted Nepali as the common medium or second language in their mutual conversation in the shared life of Darjeeling. Because of the social need the other languages phased out as those were used less and Nepali emerged as the first language or mother tongue... The collective consciousness that was germinating among the Nepalis in Darjeeling found its support in the Nepali language. Here, the language became the strong foundation for Nepali jati (community).”

After the collective consciousness grew amongst the people, it became easy for them to identify themselves as Nepali and the process was facilitated by the colonial the political socialization under colonial rule. The social, economical and political exigencies of the Colonial political economy provided atmosphere in which a political culture of Gorkhas developed which was different from that of Nepal. In India an integrated homogenous Nepali community emerged with Nepali as lingua franca whereas, the case was not same in Nepal; Nepali was the state imposed national language. In this regard, Ramakrisha Sharma, a well known critic from Darjeeling, observed that Nepali society had come into existence in Darjeeling much before Nepal.

As according to Paul Brass, “the process of creating communities from ethnic groups involves the selection of particular dialects or religious practices or styles of dress or historical symbols from a variety of available alternatives.” In this context Gorkha/Nepali identity, language played a vital role in creating a community from many ethnic groups. Sara Shneiderman says that in good Andersonian fashion, all of the studies of Nepali nationalism in Darjeeling emphasise the major role literature played in consolidating this new identity, particularly in the first half of the twentieth century. And this describes the discursive production of Nepali identity to the exclusion of ethnic identity as the different sub groups such as Lepchas and Bhotias had clubbed themselves under the larger Nepali society in India. Thus, Nepali identity irrespective of all ethnic groups was used by all Darjeeling activists to represent themselves until 1990s. The Gorkhaland movement was propagated by a generation of Indian Nepali nationalist who were ideologically committed to the notion that individual ethnic identities must be secondary to a unified Nepalis ethnic identity of Indians of Nepali

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21 ibid, 153
22 Brass, Ethnicity and Nationalism: Theory and Comparison, 25.
heritage were to gain any benefits from the state. Intra-Nepali identity politics emerged in early 1990s after dissatisfaction among the people with Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council and its failure to bring benefit in the area, which was the settlement which ended the Gorkhaland Movement in 1988. The shift from a Nepali national identity to a group-by-group ethnic identity strategy would be productive avenue for gaining benefits from the state began to gain currency after 1993, when the Mandal Commission published its recommendation for revising the scheduled caste (SC) Scheduled Tribe (ST) and other backward classes (OBC) system of reservation and instituting a new system of benefits.²³

ROLE OF LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN DEVELOPING A STRONG NEPALI IDENTITY IN INDIA

Colonial state started territorial expansion through series of acquisitions from Sikkim and Bhutan towards the middle of the nineteenth century. They had established their modern regime of power by early twentieth century. Colonial expansion towards the frontier of Darjeeling hills resulted in establishment of institution of European form of civil society though project remained incomplete. Pratha Chatterje in Nation and its Fragments says, “Process of legitimation of the colonial state by creating a public domain in the form of civil society was fundamentally limited as it could confer only subjecthood on the colonised. In response the colonised refused to accept membership of this civil society began constructing their identities within the narratives of the community.” Moreover, the civil society was not spread evenly; it influenced only the limited group of people, thus the enlightened elites often engaged in a pedagogical mission in relation to the rest of the society. Similar scenario was visible in Darjeeling as well. Toward the second decade of nineteenth century a sizeable number of middle class has emerged in Darjeeling. They were primarily engaged in educating the masses in order to form a strong Nepali community within India. Pratyoush Onta identifies ‘general education’ and ‘improvement of Nepali language and literature’ to understand the reform movement then. Civil society organisation like Nepali Sahitya Sammelan in 1924, Gorkha Dukha Niwarak Sammelan in 1932, Sri Hitkari Sammelan in 1945, Himalayan Kala Mandir in 1950 and many other had emerged which were involved actively in redefining and creating a new self-identity based on the idea of kinship (Nepali daju bhai). The other important factor in this amalgamation was the standardization and universalisation of Nepali language. The efforts of these organisation and many other factors together constituted the Gorkha jati. Thus, colonialism helped in providing base for fashioning a new identity.²⁴

The section of people who were influenced by institution of European form of civil society played a vital role in consolidating a strong sense of self identity.

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²³ Shneiderman, “Ethnic (P)reservations: Comparing Thangmi Ethnic Activism in Nepal and India,” 119
The Nepalis of India fought a very long battle to include Nepali language in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. Various organisations were formed with major objectives being recognition of Nepali language and its inclusion in the Eighth Schedule of Indian Constitution. The ‘Akhil Bharatiya Nepali Bhasa Sangharsha Samiti’ was formed in 1967 in Darjeeling, ‘Assam Nepali Sahitya Sammelan’ was set up in Udalguri, a branch of ‘All India Nepali Bhasa Samiti’ was set up in Guwahati in 1972, and the ‘Nepali Sahitya Prachar Samiti’ was set up in Siliguri, Darjeeling District, in 1978. They organised meeting, made resolution and presented memorandum to both State and Central government for recognition and inclusion of their language in the Constitution of India. Guwahati Nepali Student Union in the meeting in its meeting on 10th March 1968 and the Assam Gorkha Samellan in its 13th annual conference held on 1968 in Tirap demanded the same. The Nepali people of India have long been demanding recognition and inclusion of the Nepali language in the Indian Constitution, so that the Indian Nepalis can be knit closely into the national life of India. The then Vice-Chancellor of Guwahati, Deba Prasad Boruah, stated on February 8, 1979 that “the recognition and inclusion of Nepali language into the Eight Schedule of Indian Constitution will not detriment the Constitution rather it will add to the composite culture.”

In 1980 a bill was introduced in the Lok Sabha for inclusion of Nepali language in Eight Schedule of Indian Constitution by Chita Basu, a former Member of Parliament. Later on 1982, Sikkim Legislative Assembly took a resolution in the same context. Hunger strike was observed on 2-4 October 1983 by the Assam Bhasa Samiti branch in Dispur. The All India Conference was held under Nar Bhadur Bhandari, the former Chief Minister of Sikkim on June 11 and 12, 1990. Bharatiya Nepali Rashtriya Parishad was formed during the Conference. The Conference was attended by more than 100 delegates from Darjeeling, Sikkim, Doars, Jalpaiguri, Dehradun, Delhi, Jammu, Siliguri, Northeast, Dharamsala, etc, the delegates urged the government of India to consider their demand and introduce an official bill on the inclusion of Nepali language. On February 20 1991 postering was done in the Nepali villages of Mizoram and telegram was sent to the Prime Minister on the same context. Atul Marak, the then Educational Minister of Meghalaya supported the demand in his speech at Gorkha Pathsal High School in Garikhana, Sikkim on the occasion of Bhanu Jayanti on 31st July 1992. Finally on 20th August 1992, the Parliament of India unanimously passed the bill on Nepali language along with Manipuri and Konkani. The Nepali language is recognised by North Bengal University, Calcutta University, North-Eastern Hill University, Banaras University and Gauhati University as one of the Indian language. Prior to recognition of Nepali language in the eight schedule of the Constitution, the government of West Bengal recognised Nepali as an Associate Language in three hill sub-
divisions of Darjeeling district on 25th September 1961. The Sahitya Akademi has also recognised the Nepali language.  

Rhoderick Chalmers characterises the development of a standardised Nepali language and unified Nepali community in India as a project. A project which was initiated by small group of individual with one minded campaign inspired with various factors like sense of patriotism, love for their mother tongue, shame at the backwardness of their society and hope for upliftment of their fellow members. Their achievement of the project can be measured in term of linear set of milestones that it has passed, from founding of journals to recognition of Nepali language in West Bengal to its recognition by Sahitya Academi and finally the inclusion in the Eight Schedule of Indian Constitution.

The Nepali jati has by now grown and developed. They started the language movement by demanding inclusion of Nepali in School and College curriculum, and later demanded Nepali as medium of instruction. The language movement turned into bigger movement by its demand to include Nepali as official State language in 1961 and later they raise demand to include Nepali in the Eight Schedule of the Constitution in 1970s with larger and wider participation of Indian Nepalis. The movement for language that disseminated the issue of identity and insecurity led to larger movement of Statehood. So, one of the most important factors that have sustained the Gorkha/Nepali identity for more than century is the socio-political activities centering around Nepali language. The ethno-class consciousness which developed during the British rule was a primary determinant in the process of the formation of the Gorkha identity. The process was further accelerated by emergence of middle class Nepali after being exposed to modern education and rational way of life under the colonial rule. However, the perception of Gorkha or Nepalis as doorman, a coolie, a soldier, a peon, and a guard still remains unchanged, and the transformation that the community faced in India remains unseen.

Beside language another factor which helped in consolidation of strong Nepali identity in India was literature. In this regard, I would like to discuss about few poets who owe their prominence to the historical situations and which later became a source of inspiration and revivalism of the Nepali identity in India. Among other one of the most prominent was Bhanubhakta (1814), he wrote his Ramayana as much with the objective of enabling everyone to obtain spiritual salvation as to reform the Nepali society as it then obtained. There was a shift of emphasis from the purely spiritual to the temporal spiritual. According to Banubhakta, for a secure blissful collective life there could be no better model for a society than the one portrayed in the ancient Indian epic. Traditional Indian thoughts and beliefs were indeed very deeply embedded in his spiritual and social being and Bharat (India) was his

28 Ibid, 111
30 Dhakal, The Urge to Belong: An Identity is Waiting, 154.
spiritual home. As Bhanubhakta sung eloquently: ‘Ati durlabh janos bharat bhumik janma janale’, which means blessed is the man who is born in India.\(^{31}\)

Indian Nepali literary writing begins with the ‘sawais’ penned mainly by Gorkha soldiers stationed in Assam and ‘laharis’ composed by Nepali labourers working in the tea gardens of Darjeeling.\(^{32}\) The literary writing in India was initiated by the Nepali/Gorkha soldiers who were enlisted in the regiments of the British Indian Army and Nepali/Gorkha labourers working in the tea garden owned by the British Planters since 1856. In this regard Indra Bahadur Rai points out that the beginning of Indian literature was made by common soldiers and labourers who wrote about their experiences of the battle field and lives lived in India, unlike the Nepal literary writing which was begun by elite Brahmans who wrote in praise of their king. Sawais composed by Tulachan Aley (43/44\(^{th}\) Gorkha Regiment) and Dhanbir Bhandari (44\(^{th}\) Gorkha Regiment) in 1893 and 1894 during the Battle of Manipur and Battle of the Abhor Hills respectively.\(^{33}\) The two sawalis and other that followed them fast is the felt identity of Gorkhas or Nepalis as a nation irrespective of their tribal castes, cultural or religious beliefs.\(^{34}\)

First Grammar of Nepali was published from Calcutta in 1820. In 1840s scriptural scripts were published from Darjeeling by the Moravian Missionaries. British administration recognised importance of language and encouraged its study. Rev. Ganga Prasad Pradhan edited Gorkha Kabar Kagaj was published from Darjeeling in 1901, before the arrival of Gorkha Paira from Kathmandu.

Darjeeling spearheaded stage production as a cultural activity bringing new life to language and literature and the culture. The most notable contribution of Darjeeling that has caused a stir in Modern Nepali Literature is a literary movement called Ayamik, the dimensional or depth writing, formed by I.B Rai, Bairangi Kaila, Ishwar Vallabh. They made revolutionary approach in theme content and style.\(^{35}\)

Few eminent poets of twentieth century were Lakshmi Prasad Devkota, Pandit Dharanidhar Sharma and Agam Singh Giri, these poets played a essential role in Indian Nepali nationalism. Lakshmi Prashad Devkota wrote voluminous epics Shakuntala in three months and dictate Sulockana ten days. He wrote Kunjini a narrative poem in one night and dictates poetic composition of ninety five excellent stanzas called Ansu in one hour and twenty minutes and could dictate collection of short stories in one sitting. The epic Shakuntala written by him says that the memories and ideals of

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\(^{32}\) Sawalis were the narrative poetic compositions in a particular kind of folk metrical rhythm and laharis were waves of feelings or emotions in the form of popular songs.

\(^{33}\) The Battle of Manipur was fought between the British East India Company and King of Manipur in 1891-93 and the Battle of the Abhor was fought between the Company and the tribal of that regions, which is Arunachal Pradesh state now.

\(^{34}\) Rai, “Indian Nepali Nationalism and Nepali Poetry,” 152

\(^{35}\) Ibid, 157
ancient India was very dear to his heart which he bequeathed to the Indian Nepalis. Pandit Dharanidhar was another able poet who served as a catalyst for the crystallisation of the feeling of Indian Nepali nationalism. Naivedya (1920) was a collection of poems by Pandit Dharanidhar Sharma which was accepted by Indian Nepalis as their national Gita.\textsuperscript{36} Agam Singh Giri became the most representative poet of Indian Nepalis, he gave expression through poems that excelled in their lyrical quality, to the feeling of general frustration prevalent among his people. War and the Warrior (1970) the last work of Giri which he wrote before his death, dealt with the keynote of Nepalis life in India and their search for self identity. According to Rai poets perform two functions; firstly they give expression to the feelings of their people, secondly the poets bring out the social truth and Nepali poets he says have acquitted themselves creditably in this, they have being the spokesmen of the society.\textsuperscript{37}

The twentieth century has seen some excellent works being produced in Nepali literature by young writer across India. The literary magazines such as Udgaar published by Sikshak Sahitya Sabsthan in Gangtok, a weekly named Dehwarta edited by Taraknath Gajurel in Assam, Rani Bhanjyang, a monthly edited by Indra Kumar Subba from Manipur, Damsang Garhi edited by Bhim Pradhan from Kalimpong and Sabda edited by Sidhartha Rai in Mirik are some of the determined efforts made by young Nepali writers and poets to accelerate the pace for enriching Nepali literature in India.\textsuperscript{38}

The initiatives of people like Parasmani Pradhan, who made early efforts in Darjeeling hills to give a separate Nepali identity, should be acknowledged. He started Gorkha Shatiya Samaj and made an effort to introduce Nepali in school curriculum like Hindi and Bengali. In the beginning he and his friend had to meet with criticism but it was his tremendous effort and strong will which led to introduction of Nepali language in Schools and Colleges (B.A) in 24 July, 1924. Magazine Chandrika started by him in 1918 was published from Kurseong. This monthly magazine tried to emulate the sophistication of the Nepali language. There were other numerous journals namely Upaynastarrangini (1902), Sundari (1906), Madhavi (1908), Chandra (1914), and Gorkhali (1915) which advocated in one form or other the need of language developments as being a key to the overall development of Gorkha/Nepali identity.\textsuperscript{39} Gorkhali not only published poems and literary articles but also carried writing advocating social reform and spread of education among Gorkha jati. Dharanidhar Koirala, a student activist and its contributor, called the advocates of the Nepali language to visit every possible villages and houses to spread the language and message about the need for general education and learning. Though many of the journals were for the short span of time but still contributed the idea among the Nepali

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid, 153
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid,153-154
\textsuperscript{39} Gorkhali was the first Nepali weekly in the name of Suryavikram Gyawali to be published from Banaras.
reading public.  

Gyawali, one of the founding members of Nepali Sahitya Sammelan says, “No matter whether we are Nepalis in Nepal or Nepalis in India, we call ourselves to be a free and independent jati. Indeed we are an independent jati. But one of the main evidence of independence is one’s separate language and literature.” This suggested that construction of its own independent literature is needed and which was the main objective of the Sammelan.

THE PROBLEM OF NEPALI/ GORKHA IDENTITY

The Nepali identity formation in India was a result of cultural renaissance in Darjeeling hills and other parts of India. But forming a strong Indian Nepali identity was unclear as it was in between national culture and Indian national identity. The problem of identity arises when this national culture not only provides resources for defining the identities but also mediates it. According to Stuart Hall national cultures are composed of symbols and representations and not of cultural institutions. National culture, Hall argues, “Construct identities by producing meaning about the nation with which we can identify.”

The process of Gorkha identity formation is connected to pre-colonial discourse of Gorkha glory and bravery. Colonialism created a platform where Gorkha are idealised and rectified as brave soldier, as identity is result of colonial construct, it remains attached to the colonial master with feudal loyalties. Their attempts to free themselves from hegemony of colonial discourse creates new subjectivity in the self /identity which is reconstitute from the same discourse from which it had come out. The emerging cultural identity of Gorkha remains hostage to the racial identities inscribed on the body of Gorkha by the white man through colonial state. Gorkhas were consigned the role of supplicant to the white man and inheritors of that colonial knowledge in the hierarchy of human beings created by Colonialism.

The course of the Gorkha history is influenced and changed by the discourse on martial race and the enlistment of the subject into British Indian army. In the beginning Colonial masters increased it influence in the frontier by normalising and civilising the hill society. They represented the Gorkha as a single identity that of a martial identity thus collapsing multiple identities within them. Golay says, “Colonialism violently disrupted the social conceptual world of the Gorkhas and taking away his freedom by permanently colonising his body. The Gorkha subject was dislocated by stripping off his past and relocated him again as a deterritorialised subject of history.”

The Gorkha identity has to balance themselves between its cultural identity and demands of citizenship and national culture of India. Their everyday experiences urge them to carve a political space for its cultural identity.

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40 Onta, “Creating a Brave Nepali Nation in British India: The Rhetoric of Jati Improvement, Rediscovery of Banubhakta and the Writing of Bir History,” 44
41 Ibid, 53
42 Golay, “Rethinking Gorkha Identity: Outside the Imperium of Discourse, Hegemony and History, 75
43 Ibid, 79
within India.\(^{44}\) India is a home for many communities like Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Oriya, Tamil, Naga, Nepali and etc. By Indian Nepali we mean the ethnically and linguistically distinctive community of people who are of Nepali origin and are Indian citizens.\(^{45}\) The misconception persists and which is rather deliberately fostered regarding the genesis of Indian Nepalis that all Nepalis in India are from Nepal.

A significant feature of northeast India and hills of West Bengal is the ubiquitous presence of a loose confederation of people called Nepalis or Gorkhas. They came to these regions during the colonial rule, and had come generally as construction workers, tea and mining labourers and military personnel. Today, there national identity is at stake as they are often curbed as illegal immigrants and foreigners. The assessment of the Gorkha community reveals that inspite of their strong political will to preserve their distinct identity; they always aspired to be integrated in Indian nationalism.\(^{46}\) Indra Bahadur Rai says that those who claim to be delvers into the past and yet describe Indian Nepalis as settlers or immigrants betray their blatant ignorance of the history of this region.

One being born in India and their parents, grandparents and great grandparents too born in present India, does not necessarily make a Nepali Indian. This is shown in analysis of the struggle for Indian identity by Indian Nepalis. In this regard Subba says that this is due to overlapping or lack of clear boundary between culture and nationality. A Nepali’s historical or/and cultural linkage with Nepal can be quite understood. What is not politically correct is continuous reminder to Indian Nepalis that they have immigrated from Nepal.\(^ {47}\)

It is not an easy task to understand the national identity of the Indian Nepalis. Firstly, it relates to the integration and disintegration of the group identity. The Nepalis who migrated to India ignored the primacy of caste identity and subsumed their identity as Newari, Rai, Tamang, Gurung, Bahuns, Kamis and others and instead integrated themselves to form a larger Nepali identity. The the difficulty arises due to lack of clear boundaries between the concepts of nationality and citizenship.\(^ {48}\)

**CONCLUSION**

Nepali language is mother tongue of many Indian nations and has been included in the eighth schedule of Indian Constitution besides being official language of neighbour nation Nepal. Nepali is the State language of Sikkim and also been officially recognised by West Bengal government. There were many important literary organisation which produced great numbers of books and periodicals in Nepali published since the beginning of twentieth century. Nepali speakers are also found in Western parts of India in Dehradun, Lucknow, Simla, Bakloh, Dharamsala and Nahan. Since the first decade of

\(^ {44}\) Ibid, 87

\(^ {45}\) Rai, “Indian Nepali Nationalism and Nepali Poetry,” 149

\(^ {46}\) Dhakal, “The Urge to Belong: An Identity is Waiting,” 163


\(^ {48}\) “Dhamala, Identity Formation and Identity Maintenance,” 170
nineteenth century Varanasi has remained the centre of Nepali literary activity and many publishing houses of Nepali books are located in Varanasi.  

The Nepalis are a group of a person who share a common language and that is Nepali. Nepalis have two identifiable ethnic identity systems, firstly, there is language as a symbol of Nepali ethnic identity and secondly, diversities of Nepalis on the basis of group, castes, subcastes and titles. According to Subba the Nepalis have multiple identities like any other Indian communities. Regional identities of Nepalis in India are quite marked and their identities are often indicated by different dialects. They often have different histories, different social composition, different predicaments, and different opportunities, and have been subjected to different cultural and linguistic influence. Their rights and privileges depend upon the different states they live in. Religious identities among Nepalis in India varies, everyone cannot be assumed to be Hindu by connecting them to Nepal, as it was only Hindu kingdom in the world until early 2006. Hinduism is mostly followed by Bahuns, Chettris, Thakuris, Kami, Damai, and Sarki. Tamang, Sherpa, Gurung, and Yolmu are Buddhists and Rai, Limbu, Yakkha, Magar, Bhujel, Sunwar, Thami, etc. are Animists. However, during the last two centuries the Buddhists and Animists have considerably converted themselves to Hindus, while Hindus have also adopted some Buddhists or Animist traits.

Nepali has no single term which explains the English term race. Jati in Nepali is used in the same context for manav jati (human race) as well as Nepali jati (the Nepalis race), and the basic meaning of it is species or type as distinct from jat, which means caste in the context of Nepali and its frequently the same as ethnic group. The terms like jat and jati are used interchangeably in common Nepali parlance and standard dictionary. Nepalis use jati to define Nepali as a community, and in Nepali rastriyata means nationality. Thus they are Nepali/Gorkha jati whose rastriyata is Indian.

Their linkage with the sovereign country Nepal leads to crisis of identity; they are recognized as Nepalese citizens. Moreover the Nepali identity produced by the Colonial rule is martial identity, after the Anglo-Nepalese War, they viewed Nepali to be the martial race and a loyal warrior and the idealisation as a brave soldiers ties the identity to white masters and feudal loyalties. Colonialism helped in developing Indian Nepali nationalism in India, as their civil society made great impact and thus gave birth to bunch of educated Nepalis in India. Who for the sake of developing their national identity took the responsibility of educating the masses and developing Nepali language and literature. Various organisation, meeting, publication

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50 Chalmers, “The Quest for Ekrupata: Unity, Uniformity and the Delineation of the Nepali Community in Darjeeling,” 341
51 Subba, “Are you from Nepal? Interrogating the Monolithic Identity of Nepalis in India,” 153-154
53 Dhakal, “The Urge to Belong: An Identity is Waiting,” 152
were done in this regard and later Nepali was also introduce in school and colleges.

The struggle of Indian Nepalis is for recognition and acceptance of their national identity by other fellow Indians and the removal of the term like foreigner or migrants, which are often used to label them. The demand for inclusion of Nepali language in the eight Schedule of the Indian Constitution was one such effort. The ethnic identity among Nepali in India took a back stage, as for them their primary identity became Gorkha/Nepali. Indeed there is no ethnic connection between them and their counterparts in India. Whether to call themselves a Gorkha or a Nepali has always remained a debateable issue which is yet to be resolved and both the terms are used synonymously. It was debated more vigorously after the Gorkhaland movement headed by Subash Ghising, who differentiated between these two terms and stressed on calling them Gorkha as Nepali associated them with subject of Nepal. However, a different nomenclature does not give any assurance that their problem of identity will be solved. The need to secure an Indian identity for themselves is their upmost priority.
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