

CHAPTER III

IDENTITY FORMATION OF THE GORKHAS

The identity of the Gorkhas as a distinct ethnic community in India has been disputed time and again. Often labeled as ‘foreigners’, ‘encroachers’ and ‘migrants’ from Nepal, the identity of the Gorkhas as Indian citizens is hardly recognized at the national level. Such an attitude by the dominant community and the policy makers gave impetus to the ‘Gorkhaland’ movement which is a movement by the Gorkhas of Darjeeling district for a separate state called ‘Gorkhaland’ within the Indian Union. The Gorkhas believe that such a state would not only put an end to their identity crisis but would also enable them to be recognized as Indian citizens as distinct from citizens of Nepal. It is interesting to note that while most ethnicity based autonomy movements demand secession from India; the Gorkhas on the other hand have been struggling to be a part of India. Since identity crisis constitutes the very basis of the Gorkhaland Movement in India, the present chapter examines the identity formation of the Gorkhas in India particularly the Northeastern Region (NER) where they are in majority.

The identity formation of Gorkhas can be broadly divided into two phases:

Phase I-Birth of Gorkha Identity during British Colonial period;

Phase II - Emergence of Gorkha identity in post- Independence Era.

PHASE I- BIRTH OF GORKHA IDENTITY DURING BRITISH COLONIAL PERIOD

The immigration of the Nepalis to Northeast India began when the British encountered the Nepalis in an adversary situation during the Anglo- Nepal war of 1814-15. They found their adversary not only brave warriors, but also effective in wild, difficult and mountainous tract. Moreover, they found them inexpensive, obedient and efficient even in trying circumstances.¹ Thus the British adopted many clandestine measures to encourage the Nepalis to settle in places like

¹ A.C. Sinha, ‘Prologue’, in (ed) **The Nepalis in Northeast India: A community in search of Indian Identity**, Indus publishing House, New Delhi, 2002, pp.15

Shillong, Darjeeling and Dehradun and dispatching *gallawallas* (local appellation for recruiting agents) to collect and recruit young boys in their army.²

However, the British policy proved to be a catalyst for an organized migration from the Nepal hills to the Indian Frontiers only to serve their own motives. After the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 the British viewed the higher caste Hindus and Muslim Hindustani soldiers as less reliable. Thus, when the British consolidated the thinly populated, entirely wild and mountainous tract covering the entire Northeastern India, they preferred the Nepalis, which could swiftly move and work as an ethnic buffer between hill and plains communities. The tribal hill tracts in Northeast India continuously necessitated armed pacification expeditions to be sent. And the Nepalis were readily available as a regular army, police, constabulary or the coolie corps to restore the law and order.³

The pre-British economy being a subsistence economy the British tried to generate more revenue by bringing more wastelands under production. It encouraged cash crop production such as cinchona, rubber, pepper and other herbal plantations.⁴ Commercial activities like timber extraction and tea plantation required strong muscle power for jungle clearance. The British, thus, encouraged immigration, and this was done by giving land on favorable terms to Nepalis, who as soon as knew about it, came freely in.⁵ Besides, the British also encouraged the Nepalis to settle in the vast wastelands of Sikkim and Bhutan so as to avoid the Chinese and Tibetan infiltration.⁶

The internal situation within Nepal also served as a positive pull factors encouraging Nepalis migration to the Northeast India. The monarchical Nepalis regime was a repressive one that considered some of the communities as enslavable.⁷ The Nepal Government had no system of paying its soldiers in cash:

²T.B.Subba, **Ethnicity, State and Development: A Case Study of the Gorkhaland Movement in Darjeeling**, Har-Anand Publications, New Delhi, 1999, pp.57.

³ A.C. Sinha, op cit. no.1, pp.15-16

⁴ Tejimala Gurung, op cit no.1, pp.175-176.

⁵ A.C. Sinha, op cit no.1, pp.17

⁶ Sajal Nag, '*Fei-isation of the Nepalis of Northeast India*,' op.cit.no.1, pp.185

⁷ A.C.Sinha, op.cit.no.1, pp.15

they fought for their nation in lieu of daily food or incase of officers, revenue-free land.⁸ Life in the hills was really difficult because there was very limited arable land in the forested and snow-bound mountain region. Under such circumstances, the conscious patronage extended by the colonial state to such migration in the form of good salary, pension disbursement centers and medical facilities for the soldiers made it very attractive for the Nepalis to enlist for the jobs in the establishments as they could even save some surplus for their kinsfolk left behind in the hills. Moreover the abundance of land in the Northeast Region for grazing and cultivation as well as the faster mode of transport by the British made both life and migration relatively comfortable for the Nepalis. The British Indian Government had created a situation in which the Nepalis were not only welcomed but also preferred as more useful compared to the ‘natives’. Thus, more than natural migration, it was sponsored immigration and settlement by the colonial administrations⁹. A brief account of the resultant Nepali settlement particularly to the Northeastern Region of India is given below.

NEPALI SETTLEMENT IN DARJEELING

Darjeeling was sparsely populated when the British set their foot there. The boundaries with its neighbouring territories were notional and people from adjoining places would come for grazing sheep and cattle or for cutting firewood. But with the discovery of Darjeeling by the British as an ideal retreat, far removed from the “heat” and “dust” of the northern plains, much of the things changed. “Immigration” was encouraged by the colonial state, as it required cheap labour for building infrastructure for its “hill station”, and most importantly for its teeming tea gardens. The British planters did not fail in employing *sardars* (local appellation for agents) who would go to Nepal and bring back “young” and “healthy” labourers to work in their tea gardens. The *sardars* in return got commissions from the planters. With the establishment of a ‘modern regime of power’ in Darjeeling, this wild frontier was gradually

⁸ T.B.Subba, op.cit.no.2, pp.56-57

⁹ A.C.Sinha, op.cit.no.1, pp.15-17

normalized into a “hill station”. The Darjeeling Municipality, one of the very few municipalities then in India, was established in 1850.¹⁰

Nepali settlement in Darjeeling further resulted with the opening up of Gorkha Regiments in Darjeeling. In Darjeeling, the Gorkha Recruitment Depot was opened in 1890 and it drew recruits from in and around Darjeeling and neighbouring Nepal. By 1908, there were as many as 10 Gorkha Regiments raised from different places in India enlisting about 53,000 persons. Mostly Magars and Gurungs who were known for their martial qualities were recruited in Darjeeling, as it was closer to Central Nepal, their traditional habitat. A large numbers of Nepalis also settled in Darjeeling as tea garden labourers and agricultural villagers in Darjeeling. With the passage of time, the Nepalis outnumbered the Lepchas who are considered to be the “aborigines” of Darjeeling.¹¹

NEPALI SETTLEMENT IN ASSAM

The British had fought against, and came to appreciate, the martial character of the Gorkhas of Nepal. After the Anglo-Gorkha War (1816 –1817, concluded by the Treaty of Segoulie), the British began mass recruitment of the Gorkhas for a battalion in India, which became known as the Gorkha battalion (army) and later the ‘Assam Rifles’. Since the British concerns were primarily military, the Gorkhas were initially to work on defense of the frontier. They first took part in operations in Sylhet (now in Bangladesh) as a part of the Cuttack Legion, later known as the Assam Light Infantry, to defend the eastern frontier in the face of mounting tension with the Burmese. The Gorkha soldiers showed extraordinary courage to send back the Burmese forces to their country. Nepali settlement in Assam as such, has its roots in the war waged by the East India Company against the Burmese on 5th March 1824 to drive the latter out of Assam. Over the six years 1833 – 1839, Gorkha soldiers came to comprise nearly one-third of the battalions in the Assam Light Infantry. Company insisted that the Gorkha soldiers should reside in Assam after retirement so that their sons could also be recruited

¹⁰ Bidhan Golay, ‘*Rethinking Gorkha Identity: Outside the Imperium of Discourse, Hegemony, and History*’, **Peace and Democracy in South Asia**, Volume 2, No 1 & 2, 2006.

¹¹ T.B.Subba, op cit no.2, pp.57-58

in the army. On retirement the ex-soldiers were given lands by the British Government to settle in the region¹². Henceforth, the 1st Assam Light Infantry at Guwahati, the 2nd Assam Light Infantry at Sadiya and the Sylhet Light Infantry served entirely in Assam and Burma until 1899 taking part in every border expeditions.¹³

Apart from the various expeditions of the colonial government against the 'wild tribes' of Northeast India, they took to agriculture farming, dairy farming, professional grazing, small time trading and rubber tapping. During that time Assam was covered with thick forest and the Gorkhas were employed for clearing the forest, necessary surveys and settlement activities. Besides, Assam with its relatively sparse population and extensive grassland along the Brahmaputra River attracted the Nepalis settlers to settle along the riverside tract.¹⁴ The Nepali herders and graziers settled initially in the wastelands near the river Brahmaputra as fodder and water was available more easily than elsewhere. The areas to the North of the river consisted of large areas of grasslands more suitable for cattle and buffaloes. The Chapori belt of the Brahmaputra, which is an alluvial formation, was most suitable as a grazing area and the Burha Chapari of Tezpur was declared a professional grazing reserve as early as in 1881.¹⁵ With the discovery of tea in Assam, the Nepali migrants were employed in tea gardens as well.

However, one wave of migration of Nepalis, which is not adequately known, is to the coalfields of Upper Assam primarily as labourers in the oil refineries at Margherita and Digboi. From the nineteenth century, under colonial intervention, private enterprises in the mining industries had begun in Assam, notable among

¹² Nira Devi, 'History of Nepali Settlement in Assam', in (ed) **Indian Nepalis: Issues and Perspectives**, (Eds T.B. Subba, A.C. Sinha, G.S. Nepal and D.R. Nepal, Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi, 2009, pp.250

¹³ Tejimala Gurung, 'Human Movement and the Colonial State: The Nepalis of Northeast India under the British Empire', op.cit no.1.pp.181

¹⁴ Nira Devi, Op cit no.1, pp.250.

¹⁵ Nath Lopita, 'Migration, insecurity and identity: The Nepali dairymen in India's Northeast', **Asian Ethnicity**, Volume 7, No. 2, June, 2006.

them being oil and coal. Since labour was not available locally as the Assamese were self sufficient, the coal industry had to depend on migrant labour. The Nepalis were then already on the migratory route to Darjeeling tea estate and army recruitment centers in various parts of India like Shillong, Darjeeling and Dehradun. They also arrived in the coalfields of Assam to do the jobs that no one else was willing or available to do so.¹⁶

NEPALI SETTLEMENT IN MANIPUR

In Manipur the establishment of the Political Agency in 1835 facilitated the entry of Gorkhas into the state. Gorkha presence was enhanced when the 42nd, 43rd and 44th Gorkha Rifles were brought to Manipur in 1880. In 1917 the 4th Assam Rifles was transferred to Manipur in which 80 percent of the soldiers were Gorkhas. In course of time the British settled the retired soldiers of the Gorkha Rifles and Assam Rifles by opening colonies. Many retired Gorkha soldiers were settled in Kanglatombi, Pangei, Mantripokheri, Kangpokpi, Kalapahar, Karong, Maram to name a few. Many of the retired Gorkha soldiers took to a cattle grazing, which was extensively pursued as an occupation in Manipur by the Nepalis.¹⁷ Grazing fees constituted an expanding source of revenue as an expanding source of revenue to the colonial state. The grazers had to pay two types of taxes annually, i.e., Rs.4 per animal as grazing tax and Re.1 per person as foreigner tax. It was stated that at one time total collection of grazing and foreigner's tax was Rs.22, 295 and Rs.35, 144 respectively. The steady increase in the number of cattle and grazing fees indicated the emergence of Nepali grazers as an important economic group in Manipur.¹⁸ In 1919, F. F. Pearson as President of the Manipur State Durbar (Hill Office) in Manipur issued an order for an area of 140 square miles to be carved out as the Kanglatombi – Kangpokpi Gorkha Reserve, to concentrate cowsheds and Gorkha settlers in one place. This move was preceded by an

¹⁶ Tejmala Gurung, '*Gorkhas as Colliers: Labour Recruitment and Racial Discourse in the Coal Mines of Assam*', **Indian Nepalis: Issues and Perspectives**, op.cit.no.13, pp.259-260.

¹⁷ Tejmala Gurung, '*Human Movement and The Colonial State: The Nepalis of Northeast India under the British Empire*', op cit.no.1, pp.175-176.

¹⁸ D.Sapkota, '*Nepali Settlement and Cattle –Rearing in India's northeast*', in (Ed) **Indian Nepalis: Issues and Perspectives**, op cit no.13, pp.220-221.

increase in taxes. As tax collection was the primary concern of the British administration in the hill areas of the state, the good amounts of tax collected from Nepali settlements encouraged the British administration. Consequently British political agents and the Durbar of Manipur legalized Nepali settlements and the establishment of *goths* (cowsheds). In 1920, Gorkha settlements and grazers' *goths* (165) were legalized in the Irang valley. In May 1933, C. Gimson, Political Agent in Manipur and President of the Manipur State Durbar, permitted settlement of 19 Gorkha families at Maram (75 kilometres North of Imphal). And in 1946, a government order decreed that the above-mentioned Kanglatombi – Kangpokpi reserve could no longer be used for grazing, and opened this land to settlement and colonization. All Gorkha grazers had to move to Irang Valley, which was declared a professional grazing reserve for Nepali settlers. Gorkha *goths* (cowsheds) were thus established at the foothills of Kangchup, Bishnupur, Irang and other places in Manipur.¹⁹

NEPALI SETTLEMENT IN MEGHALAYA

The Nepalis settled in Meghalaya as early as 11 February 1835, when the Khasi Hills Agency was set up with Cherrapunjee as the Headquarter. The British, noting the bravery and loyalty of the Gorkhas, paid special attention to their welfare. Lands around the regimental centers were allotted to the retired Gorkhas where, in course of time, Gorkha localities grew up. Thus after the link was established between the Khasi Hills and Nepal through the Gorkhas there were more Nepalis entering these hills. They came as porters, grazers, farmers, traders, hewers of wood, *chowkidars*, labourers, miners etc. In the Khasi Hills of Meghalaya, the Syiems, or chiefs, who derived additional revenue from the grazing fees they collected from the Nepali herders, allowed the Nepali herders. The Nepalis were therefore allowed to colonize the vast wastelands and jungle plains and function as dairy herders and grazers. The village of Raing Kang in Meghalaya came to be known as the *Khuntiwala* village [Khunties (sic) herders' temporary sheds].²⁰ One of the factor attracting them to Meghalaya was the presence of coal mines that needed plentiful supply of labour and the Nepalis

¹⁹ Nath Lopita, Op cit no.16.

²⁰ Nath Lopita, Op cit no.16.

already victims of poverty, needed no second thought to leave their land and make a beeline for these hills which offered them job opportunities.²¹

NEPALI SETTLEMENT IN MIZORAM

The history of Gorkha settlement in the present state of Mizoram began when the British dispatched Gorkha troops against the Mizos in a series of expeditions from 1844 to 1889. And it was in 1891 that peaceful relation between the British and Mizos was permanently established and the Political Officer was appointed to look after the administration. Once peace prevailed in the hills, the British Government required manpower for developmental works. This was the beginning of the settlement of the Gorkhas in the state. The amalgamation of the North and South Lushai Hills as one administrative unit called the Lushai Hills District in 1898 further opened opportunities for the Gorkhas to migrate and settle here. These Gorkhas who were skilled in various trades were immediately engaged according to the needs of the district administration. Some of them were even employed by the Mizo Chiefs in their villages. The first Gorkha families who settled down permanently were found in Maubawk, Khagdiya and Kolasib. They were direct descendents of the discharged military personnel of long services, originally recruited in Mizoram Hills. The natives belonged to the Mongoloid race as most of the Gorkhas do, and their hospitable, carefree, fun-loving, friendly, straight-forward nature helped in developing a close and harmonious relationship between them and the Gorkhas which later cemented the bond of friendship and brotherhood between the two communities.²²

After their release from service, a number of Gorkhas settled down around these places. The British also rehabilitated its Gorkha ex-soldiers on at least forty sites numbering as many as three thousand individuals. Of such sites, Assam alone had thirteen, Manipur eight, Mizoram and Nagaland seven each, Arunachal Pradesh three and Meghalaya and Tripura one each. Establishment of the professional grazing reserves increased the amount of tax assessed, making the Nepali grazers

²¹ Amena Passah, '*Nepalis in Meghalaya: Diaspora and Identity*', in (Ed) **Indian Nepalis: Issues and Perspectives**, Op cit no.13, pp.238.

²² K.L.Pradhan, '*Mizoram Gorkhas: Issues and Problems*', in (Ed) **Indian Nepalis: Issues and Perspectives**, op cit no.13, pp.225-227.

and dairy farmers an important source of revenue to the colonial exchequer. In the states of Northeast India thus, the Nepali herders and grazers emerged as an important economic group. These new settlers adapted the physical and social environment of the places of their settlement by learning the local languages, contracting marital alliances and contributing to the local economy substantially.²³

EMERGENCE OF NEPALI LINGUA-FRANCA IN INDIA

The Nepali population in NER mainly comprised three categories of settlers; first, soldiers; second, grazers; third, colliers working in tea gardens and coalmines. The caste backgrounds of the Nepali soldiers recruited by the British colonialist were mainly Mangar, Gurung, Rai and Limbu and hardly any Brahmin or Chhetri. This is because the Brahmins had lost the trust of the British particularly after the Revolt of 1857 due to their alleged allegiance to the Indian National Movement even while in the service of the British Army.²⁴ Furthermore, recommendations to recruit the Mangars and the Gurungs in particular were made by persons like General Ochterlony and Brian Hodgson who witnessed the martial qualities of Mangars and Gurungs in the Anglo-Nepal war of 1815.²⁵ With regard to the caste background of the Nepali grazers and labourer, it was found that they mostly belonged to the non-martial race such as Bahuns, Chhetris, Damais and Kamis. This, however, could not be maintained for long as many Nepali soldiers after retirement took up grazing as their profession. The pensioned soldiers even worked as ordinary coolies in coal mines who were persuaded to come there on the assurances given by Nepali contractors working under the company that they would be employed as Commissariat Officers, soldiers and policemen etc. on handsome salaries with free clothing and a good rations.²⁶ Eventually, this led to the mingling of the Nepalis of martial as well as non-martial caste background.

²³ A.C.Sinha, *'The Indian Northeast Frontier and the Nepali Immigrants'*, op.cit.no.1, pp.44-45

²⁴ T.B. Subba, *'Nepalis in Northeast India: Political Aspirations and Ethnicity'*, in (ed) A.C.Sinha and T.B. Subba op cit no.1, pp.60

²⁵ T.B. Subba op cit no.2, pp.6-7

²⁶ Tejimala Gurung, *'Gorkhas as colliers: Labour Recruitment and Racial Discourse in the Coal Mines of Assam'*, op cit no.13, pp.259-263

These migrants who lived separately in their own respective villages and speak their own dialect in Nepal had to live collectively in the British colonial administration in India. Because of the social needs, the migrants gave up their individual dialect and adopted Nepali as the common medium or the first language. Thus, the social, economic and political exigencies of the colonial political economy provided congenial background in which an integrated homogeneous Nepali community with Nepali as lingua franca emerged in India. Kumar Pradhan, an eminent historian of Darjeeling writes:

“The migrants, who shared Nepali as the middle or second language with the primary Tibeto-Burman languages in their homeland, adopted Nepali as the common medium or second language in their mutual conversation in the shed life of Darjeeling. Because of the social need the other languages phased out as those were used less and less and Nepali emerged as the first language or the mother tongue.” Subsequently, it may be pointed out that most groups corporately identified as ‘Nepalis’ today had separate identities till 1920s. It was only after 1920s that all these groups began to identify themselves as ‘Nepalis’. Thus ‘Nepali’ as an ethnic group is of rather recent origin.

ASSERTION OF GORKHA IDENTITY AND FORMATION OF GORKHA ASSOCIATIONS

At a time the Nepali *Jati* was in the making²⁷ the British Government all through maintained the special status of Darjeeling District in one form or other. Though the District had been under the overall jurisdiction of Bengal since 1912, it was either a Scheduled District (1874-1919) or a Backward Tract and Excluded Area (1919-1935) and finally a Partially Excluded Area under the 1935 Act.²⁸ Thus, an Act, either of the federal legislature or of the provincial legislatures, would not extend to the Darjeeling District, and less the Governor of the province who was the representative of the British Crown would give his assent to the application of the Act in its entirety of with such modification as he thought necessary.²⁹

²⁷ See Rajendra P. Dhakal, ‘*The Urge to Belong: An Identity in Waiting*’, op.cit.no.13, pp.155.

²⁸ See Dyutish Chakraborty, ‘*Gorkhaland: Evolution of Politics of Segregation*’, **Special Lecture**, Center for Himalayan Studies, University of North Bengal, April, 1988

²⁹ Rajendra P. Dhakal, op.cit.no.13, pp.155

The British Government argued that it was mainly for the protection of cultural identity of a backward people and preservation of indigenous system. But beneath the surface, it was military consideration and as such was a part of overall British frontier policy. The British Government was apprehensive to place the Indian frontier under the control of a Government responsible only to the people of India. Thus, the British adopted the policy of segregation so as to keep the frontier under the sole unfiltered control of the Imperial Government. Besides, the European Tea Planters were interested to retain the control over the Darjeeling Tea Plantations, which was no less than a gold mine at that time.³⁰ The intention, it appears was also to keep the Indian Gorkhas isolated from the wave of freedom movement that was gaining momentum elsewhere in India and at the same time prevents them from growing politically conscious.³¹

The situation began to change in the second quarter of the 20th century. Several factors were responsible for this change. The most important one was the English education. The Christian Missionaries were pioneer in expanding the English education in the hill areas. They were also active to create a new social and cultural environment in the hill areas. Secondly, the European planter's life styles had cast a great influence on the life pattern, hopes and ambitions of the simple Nepalis folk and other hill men. Thirdly, the retired military personnel who came home brought along with them the winds of change blowing over the world outside. Fourthly, with the development of Darjeeling as the Headquarter of the district as well as the summer capital of Bengal in 1879, the employment base was expanded.

The result was that in the thirties a nucleus of English educated intelligentsia, contractors, and petty traders developed from among the Gorkha urban population. This emerging middle class was looking for professional services, which were already captured by the Bengali *Baboos*. The contractors, petty traders and timber merchants wanted a share of the economy of the hill areas which was already captured by the Marwaris and Biharis who migrated to

³⁰ See Dyutish Chakraborty, op.cit.no.29

³¹ Rajendra P.Dhakal, op.cit.no.13, pp.156.

Darjeeling once the company opened up the Darjeeling Hills to the outside world in order to make it marketable.³²

The emerging middle class soon became the “leaders of the hill people”. The “hill people” here referred to the Lepchas, Bhutias, and the Nepalis. To fulfill their aspirations they submitted the first ever memorandum to the British in 1907 demanding a separate administrative unit. However, the memorandum of 1907 was just a spark. More systematic and articulate demand for either a special status or autonomy from Bengal appeared with the formation of Hillmen’s Association under the leadership of Laden La in 1917. The association maintained that ‘the intimate connection with the plains of Bengal is of recent origin’; otherwise, historically this tract of land was connected with Sikkim and Bhutan. The hilly terrain is the natural habitat of Mongoloid people quite distinct from the rest of Bengal. A memorial submitted to the Government of Bengal by representatives of the Darjeeling District stressed: “that in laying down plans for the future, the Government should aim at the creation of separate unit comprising the present Darjeeling District with the portion of Jalpaiguri district which was annexed from Bhutan in 1865.” It also aired the concept of North East Frontier Province on grounds of both racial as well as military expediency: “It is possible, indeed that the Government might consider it wise to create a still North Eastern Frontier Province, in addition to this District, the Assam, Dooars and hill territories which lie to the East of Bhutan and whose people have affinities with our people.”

Till 1930, the demand was for a Scheduled Area or Excluded Area, but the memorandum of the Hillmen’s Association dated August 06, 1934 had two dimensions: on one hand, the claim was for a special status with preferential treatment within the administrative jurisdiction of Bengal. On the other, suggestion for formation of autonomous unit or a full-fledged province was offered in the event of the permanent safeguards not been granted. However, under section 92 of the Government of India Act, 1935 the district of Darjeeling

³² See Ananda Gopal Ghosh, *Growth of Professional Class in the Hill Areas of Darjeeling District: Emergence of Elite Conflict*, **Special Lecture**, Center for Himalayan Studies, University of North Bengal, 1988.

was made a “partially excluded area” and ‘independent administrative unit’, and a demand by this Association was not granted.³³

The Hillmen’s Association lost its soul after the death of Laden La in late 1936.³⁴ But, All India Gorkha League (AIGL) formed on 15th May 1943 took the cudgel from the Hillmen’s Association. For the first time a political organization exclusively for hill people under the banner ‘Gorkha’ was formed under the leadership of Dambar Singh Gurung.³⁵ The objectives of AIGL were:

1. To get the Gorkhas recognized as a separate minority community;
2. To get them represented in the provincial legislatures wherever they are settled;
3. To get them represented in the interim Government; and
4. To free all Gorkhas held as political prisoners by the British Govt.

However, Dambar Singh Gurung’s premature death on April 07, 1938 came as a big blow to the AIGL.

On April 06, 1947 Ganeshlal Subba and Ratanlal Brahmin on behalf of the Darjeeling District Committee of the Communist Party of India (CPI) submitted a memorandum to Jawaharlal Nehru for the creation of ‘Gorkhasthan’ – an independent nation comprising of the present day Nepal, Darjeeling District and Sikkim, excluding its North District. It appears that this demand was made by CPI to broaden its base in the Nepali-speaking areas. It knew what would sell in Darjeeling then: not Marxism or Leninism but ‘Gorkhalism’.

PHASE II – EMERGENCE OF GORKHA IDENTITY DURING THE POST- INDEPENDENCE ERA

With the independence of India, the special position of Darjeeling as a partially excluded area came to an end, and Darjeeling became one of the general districts of the newly constituted state, West Bengal. By that time, the AIGL under leadership of Randhir Subba claimed itself to be the sole champion of the cause of Gorkha minority in West Bengal. AIGL in its memorandum to Jawaharlal

³³ Dyutish Chakraborty, op.cit.no.29

³⁴ T.B.Subba, op.cit.no.2, pp.29

³⁵ Dyutish Chakraborty, op.cit.no.29

Nehru dated 29th April 1952 suggested three alternative solutions to the problem of Darjeeling:

- (1) That the district be a separate Administrative Unit directly administered by the Centre.
- (2) That a separate Province be set up comprising the district of Darjeeling and the neighboring areas.
- (3) That the district of Darjeeling with a section of Jalpaiguri be included in Assam.

LANGUAGE DEMAND AND THE GROWTH OF GORKHA IDENTITY

The recognition of Nepali as the official language of the district as well as its inclusion in the 8th Schedule of the Constitution was the other important demand of the Nepalis except autonomy. With the appointment of Official Language Commission with B.G.Kher as the Chairman in 1955, and that of the States Reorganization Commission in 1953, the language demand intensified. As a result, during the 1961 census various tribal populations who were by then functionally bilingual recorded themselves as Nepali – speaking. In 1961, the numerical strength of Nepali – speaking people in Darjeeling rose to three lakhs sixty-nine thousand (59.9%) of the total population from a meager eighty – nine thousand (19.9%) in 1951. The language demand as such brought the various hill groups and tribes closure and accelerated the pace of integration of hill people and growth of ‘Gorkha Identity’.³⁶

Thus, one of the most important factors that have sustained the Nepali/Gorkha identity over more than a century is the socio-political activity centering on Nepali language. The sense of identifying the self and others gradually developed along with the realization that they belonged to economically and administratively oppressed class. This ethno-class consciousness that developed in an atmosphere of colonial polity and administration was a primary determinant in the process of the formation of Gorkha Identity. The process was accelerated by the emerging Nepali middle class under colonial hegemony who were exposed to modern education and rational way of life. The growing collective consciousness of the hill people was also bolstered by the British policy of

³⁶ See Dyutish Chakraborty, op.cit.no.29.

keeping them outside the reform process as well as the apathy of the Indian National Congress that ruled the country for many decades after the freedom was achieved.³⁷ This brought the integration of the various hill groups and tribes closer fostering the growth of Gorkha identity

It should be noted that earlier in 1955 when State Re-organization Commission (SRC) visited Darjeeling the figure placed before them of the total strength of the Nepali-speaking people was 19.98 percent only, on the basis of 1951 census. This calculation obviously excluded dialects of various hill tribes like Gurung, Mangar, Tamang, Rai etc who till then did not record themselves in the Census as Nepali or Gorkhali speaking people. However, the West Bengal Government simply stood by the 1951 official census position. A draft of the ‘West Bengal Official Language Bill’ was distributed in the Assembly on the 13th September 1961. The Bill proclaimed promotion of Bengali for official purposes of the state without any mention to the status of Nepali. This effected widespread protest in Darjeeling. The Nepalis of Darjeeling viewed such a low percentage, i.e., 20 percent approximately of the total population of the district as a ‘mystery’, a result of deliberate distortion. In fact, B.C. Roy, the then Chief Minister of West Bengal himself had some reservations about the census figure and for this reason deferred the decision till the 1961 census. The 1961 census witnessed a massive rise in the numerical strength of Nepali speaking people in Darjeeling that rose to three lakhs sixty-nine thousand (59.9%) of the total population from a meager eighty-nine thousand (19.9%) in 1951. This growth was mainly due to the fact that various tribal population like Gurung, Magar, Tamang, Rai etc who were by then functionally bilingual, recorded themselves as Nepali-speaking.

Under such circumstances the Central Government was compelled to recognize Nepali as an additional official language for the district of Darjeeling, in the West Bengal Official Language Act, 1961(25th September). The Clause (2) of the Act states, “In the three hill subdivisions of the district of Darjeeling, namely Darjeeling, Kalimpong and Kurseong, the Bengali language and the Nepali language, and elsewhere, the Bengali language shall be the language or languages to be used for official purposes.” Since, language is seen as an “outward sign of a

³⁷ See Rajendra P.Dhakal, op.cit.no13, pp.152-155

group's peculiar identity and a significant means of its continuation,"³⁸ the Nepalis achieved recognition as a significant ethnic community in India with the recognition of Nepali language as the additional official language for the district of West Bengal and subsequently in the 8th Schedule of the Indian Constitution.

CONTRIBUTION OF VARIOUS ORGANISATIONS IN THE EMERGENCE OF A UNIFIED NEPALI IDENTITY

Various organizations in Darjeeling played a significant role in the emergence of a unified Nepali identity. The Hillmen's Association, 1917 that first demanded a "separate administrative set-up" for Darjeeling in an attempt to bring the hill communities together started a publication of a Nepali monthly entitled Nebula (i.e., Nepali, Bhutia, Lepcha) in February 1935. The All India Gorkha League formed in 1943 repeatedly demanded the inclusion of Nepali in the VIII Schedule. In 1967, an organization called Nepali Bhasa Sangarsha Samiti was established under the leadership of Mr. Guman Singh Chamling. It worked to incorporate the Nepali language in University courses for teaching. In 1969, Nepali Bhasa Prayog Gara Abhiyan Samiti was formed under the chairmanship of Mr. Prem Sherpa with Mr. Haren Allay as Secretary. The All India Bhasa Samiti (AINBS) formed on 31st May 1972 spearheaded the language movement. The Memoranda put forth by AINBS on 29th September, 1977 laid down that "the inclusion of Nepali represents the long cherished aspirations of over five million Indians with Nepali as their mother tongue and the non-inclusion of Nepali in the VIII Schedule has created a sense of deprivation in the minds of a large section of people in the country. It is natural for them to suffer from a sense of insecurity. Many privileges accruing from the constitutional recognition of Nepali will help the development of a linguistic minority and will go on long way to bring about a deep emotional integration in our Nation."³⁹

³⁸ See Dyutis Chakraborty. op cit.no.29

³⁹ Michael Hutt, *'Being Nepali without Nepal: Reflections on South Asian Diaspora'*, in D.Gellner, J. Pfaff-Czarnecka and J. Whelpton ed **'Nationalism and Ethnicity in Hindu Kingdom: The Politics and Culture of Contemporary Nepal'**, Routledge Publication, UK, 2004.

In the 1980s, the Gorkhaland National Liberation Front (GNLF) attempted to revive the spirit of 'Nebula' with slogans such as "*Lepcha, Bhutia, Nepali, hami sabai Gorkhali*" (Lepcha, Bhutia, Nepali, –we are all Gorkhali). Subash Ghising, leader of the GNLF, who demanded the formation of a separate state of Gorkhaland was in favour of the term Gorkha, not Nepali. His argument was that if the Nepalis of Darjeeling want an identity of their own, separate from the Nepalese of Nepal, it would be possible only with the recognition of the Gorkha language. Ghising wanted to project himself as the champion of the cause of the Gorkha language and of the Gorkha community in the whole of India.⁴⁰

The demand for the Constitutional recognition of Nepali was also carried unabated in Sikkim under the leadership of the then Chief Minister, Mr. Nar Bahadur Bhandari. The Bhartiya Nepali Rashtriya Parishad was formed in Gangtok in June 1990, with Bhandari as Chairman. He claimed the organization to be an organization of Nepalis from all over the country. These were organizations not only in Darjeeling and Sikkim but elsewhere too like Assam Nepali Student's Union, Guwahati; Meghalaya Nepali Student Union; Akhil Bhartiya Nepali Bhasha Samiti, Dehradun and others who supported the same cause. Various political parties also gave support to the demand like Congress, CPI (M), BJP, DMK, Telugu Desam and other.⁴¹ A delegation of the Akhil Bhartiya Nepali Bhasha Samiti (All India Nepali Language Committee) met the Indian Prime Minister, Morarji Desai, in September 1977, asking for the inclusion of Nepali on the grounds that it represented "the long-cherished aspiration of our five million Indians with Nepali as their "mother tongue" who suffered from a "sense of insecurity" because of its exclusion from the Schedule. The delegation's communication argued that the inclusion of Nepali would bring about "the development of a linguistic minority" and "emotional integration", and pointed out that the same demand had been supported by 74 MPs in 1971, and now had the backing of the state governments of West Bengal and Sikkim.

⁴⁰ Ibid

⁴¹Alina Pradhan, 'Language in Politics of Recognition: A Case of the Nepali Language in the creation of Political Identity of the Nepalis in Darjeeling', *Language in India*, Volume 10 No 9, September, 2010.

A total of 19 private bills were passed for constitutional recognition of Nepali. One of the most elaborate was the one placed by Mrs. D. K. Bhandari of Sikkim Sangram Parishad on 28th February, 1992, which finally led to the constitutional recognition of the Nepali language on August 31st 1992 together with Manipuri and Konkani.⁴² The constitutional recognition to the Nepali language encouraged self-identification of Nepalis with the pluralistic society of India. It brought within the Nepali manifold different communities which till then maintained their identity independent of Nepali lingua franca. Various organizations can thus be credited for the emergence of a unified Nepali identity which through their constant attempts succeeded in bringing together different communities within the Nepali manifold.

ANTI- FOREIGNERS AGITATION AND RESURGENCE OF GORKHA IDENTITY

The Nepalis of NER lived in harmony with the local people and there was no problem for them for a very long period of time. They learned the local languages, married with local women and even adapted themselves to the local cultures and traditions.⁴³ In Assam, the earlier generation of immigrant Nepalis had so assimilated and integrated with the Asamiya nationality that they preferred to identify themselves as ‘Nepali Asamiya’. This Assamisation of the Nepalis was reflected in their contribution to Assamese language and literature. Writers like Hari Prasad Gorkha Rai, Agni Bahadur Chhetri, Man Bahadur Chhetri, Tikaram Upadhyay to name a few with their varied writings in Assamese, enriched the language. While Nepalis like Chabilal Upadhyay and Dalbir Singh Lohar also fought for the official recognition of Assamese as the medium of instruction up to the graduate level at par with English (1971). Maheswar Neog in his presidential address to the Mangaldoi Session of the Assam Sahitya Sabha in 1974, remarked that, “For all practical purposes, the Nepalis are Asamiyas.” The process of assimilation and integration was so nearly complete that a conjunct

⁴²Op.cit.no.24

⁴³ Ranju R.Dhamala, *Identity Formation and Identity Maintenance: Nepalis in India*, op cit no.13,pp.169

identity of 'Nepali-Asamiya' emerged and the Nepalis seemed happy enough in this conjunct identity of 'Nepali-Asamiya'.

This however did not last long. In the late 1970s, the record 82% increase in the total population of Assam during the twenty year period from 1951 to 1971 led to an unprecedented anti-outsider upsurge, i.e., the Assam or Anti-foreigners Movement in Assam from 1979 to 1983. The leadership of the Assam Movement began to target not only the illegal immigrants from Bangladesh but also the Nepali immigrants to Assam. The presence of the Nepalis well-integrated into the Asamiya community and the continuing immigration began to evoke feelings of doubt in the Asamiya mind, creating a sense of injury to the Asamiya nationality caused by the fear of losing their identity in their own homeland. The provisions of the Indo-Nepal Friendship Treaty (1950) were deliberately ignored and it was suggested that those who came after 1951 were 'foreigners' in Assam. The targets were the refugees from Bangladesh, but the Nepalis were also included.

Eviction notices were served in Assam against the Nepalis and were deported from Assam while the names of a large number of Nepalis were excluded from the voter's list on the ground that they were foreigners. The Nepalis irrespective of their length of stay in Assam, virtually became 'dangerous', 'unwanted foreigners' in Assam, who were alleged to have been "threatening the socio-cultural and political identity of the Asamiyas" in their traditional homeland. The Asamiya- Nepali nexus was soon torn apart.

Such derogatory treatment meted out against the Nepalis led to the resurgence of Gorkhali identity in Assam. They slowly started identifying themselves with the Gorkha past, Hindu traditionalism, and the pan-Nepali solidarity movement. In a bid to assert their identity they organized themselves to form various organizations like Assam Nepali Student Union (AANSU), Nepali Jatiya Parishad (NJP), and the Nepali Suraksha Parishad (NSP). They complained that the Nepali people living in Assam for generations were not issued 'Permanent Residence Certificate' (PRC) by the district authorities and thus they were being deprived of citizenship rights. On September 8, 1985 the different Nepali organizations in Assam got together and formed the Joint Action Committee of Assamese Nepali Organizations with R.P. Sharma as its convener. The main aim

of the committee was to help protect the citizenship rights of the Indian Nepalis.⁴⁴ Thus, the grievances of the Assam Movement rekindled the ethnic consciousness among the Assam Nepalis. The Nepali community that maintained a submerged identity now asserted their separate Nepali identity within Assam and campaigned for the democratic rights of the Nepalis in Assam. By 1983, the Assam Movement began to lose its strength and in 1985 it ended with the signing of the Assam Accord between the student agitators and the Government of India headed by Rajiv Gandhi. It was agreed that only the post-1971 illegal migrants were to be detected and determined. The Illegal Migrants Determination by Tribunal (IMDT) Act, 1983 further settled the matter, which ensured that the genuine Indian citizens belonging to the minority communities could not be harassed in the search and detection of foreigners. As far as the Nepalis of foreign origin were concerned, the Restricted Area Permit was introduced in 1976 for them.

However, neither the Assam Accord nor the IMDT Act provided a long-term relief to the Nepalis in Assam. They again got caught in crossfire. This time it was the demand of the Bodos for a separate state called 'Bodoland' on the north bank of Brahmaputra in Assam. Political violence, which characterized the Bodoland Movement under the extremist leadership, took the form of an "ethnic cleansing campaign". The 1991 census (Language Reports), showed that the Nepali population in the Bodoland Areas (an average of 2.5%) is not large enough to constitute a threat to the Bodos. In spite of this, violence occurred in the Bodo areas of Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon and Gossaigoan in the beginning of 1993. These attacks continued till 1998, increasing the number of the displaced persons to 80,000 consisting of mostly Santhals but included Nepalis too. The most horrific incident noted was when a gang of miscreants set fire on the house of Chaila Rai, an 82 year old ex-serviceman, resident of Amjuli since the 1950s, burying four people alive on the ground that he was a citizen of Nepal, a foreigner. In 1993, a leader of the Bodo community, in consultation with a number of Bodo leaders published a booklet titled 'On Predicament with Foreigners' (a special issue on Nepalis) (September 1993, Udalguri), where, in

⁴⁴ See Lopita Nath, 'Conflict-Afflicted Nepalis in Assam: The Reality', op cit no.1, pp.208-227

very harsh terms, he remarked, “Bodos considered the Nepalis as foreigners inhabiting in India”. In the same tone throughout the contents he referred to the Nepalis as outsiders and anti-nationals.⁴⁵

Repercussions of the anti-foreigners agitation in Assam were also felt in the other states of Northeast India. In Manipur, the movement manifested itself in direct attacks on the Nepalis in 1980, compelling many who were domiciled in 1947 to shift houses and flee to safer areas. The fall-out has been particularly noticeable in Meghalaya where the Nepalis became a special target of attack immediately after the signing of the Assam Accord. In 1986 – 1987, violence was primarily targeted at the Nepalis living in Shillong, Jowai and other parts of Meghalaya. Until then, the state allegedly had over 150,000 Nepali settlers. The first targets were the Nepali labourers working in the coalmines in Jowai, from where the violence spread to other parts of Meghalaya. Violence involved killings, burning of Nepali villages and schools. The worst affected were the dairy farmers who had to give up their occupation forever, as their cowsheds were burnt down and their cattle looted.⁴⁶ In the check-gate of Bakshirhat and Shrirampur on the Assam-Meghalaya border the Nepalis were being detained, interrogated and stopped according to official instructions. The situation turned so grave that during February-March, 1985 the Meghalaya Police raided Bapung, Khilehriat, Ladrymbai and the adjoining coal mining areas to pick up those who failed to furnish any satisfactory evidence regarding their nationality. Contrary to popular impression, the expulsion of the Nepalis was not restricted to the coal mine-areas of Jaintia Hills alone. At the end of March 1986, seven to ten thousand Nepalis were displaced from the whole of Meghalaya. The so-called ‘foreigners’ most of whom were Nepalis were taken in trucks and left in the Assam border at Khanapara. The Government of Meghalaya did not bother even to inform the Government of Assam about its actions. The Assam Government expressed unhappiness at the depositing of the so-called foreigners at its doorstep. But soon an understanding was reached between the two Governments headed by the

⁴⁵ See Lopita Nath, *ibid*.

⁴⁶ Nath Lopita, Op cit no.16.

Congress and Assam Gana Parishad who jointly made arrangements for escorting and dropping the Nepalis at the Assam-Bengal border.

The growing problem compelled the Meghalaya Nepalis to unite themselves and assert their identity like the Nepalis in Assam. They formed organizations like Meghalaya Gorkha Welfare Union, All-Meghalaya Students Union and All Meghalaya Nepali Shramik Sangha and condemned the method adopted by the Government of Meghalaya to detect foreigners. They urged upon the Government to first abrogate the Indo-Nepal Treaty of 1950 before driving out the 'foreigners' from India. They also demanded passport-visa system between India and Nepal.⁴⁷ The question of Gorkha identity cropped in Mizoram too when the influx of people from Nepal increased in the early part of 1980s. They lived in the outskirts of Aizawl as cowherds and supplied milk to the city. Though they did not constitute any threat to the people of Mizoram economically, the latter perceived demographic threat with the multiplication of the Gorkha population in the state. It alarmed the permanent Nepali settlers too. The Mizoram Gorkha Youth Association formed in 1976 along with the Gorkha leaders appealed to the government to recognize the permanent Gorkha inhabitants as one of the tribes and extend facilities at par with the natives. They also demanded for the census of their community to identify the permanent Gorkhas. Accordingly, the Census of the Gorkhas who were permanently residing in Assam prior to 26th January 1950 as furnished by the Deputy Commissioner was taken. But the Mizo Student's Joint Action Committee burnt the official gazette and demanded immediate cancellation of it vehemently opposed it. The Gorkha leaders, on their part, continued to apprise the Government the plight of their community and urged for reconsideration of their demands.⁴⁸

The Anti- foreigners Movement caused the Nepalis, although long domiciled, suffer from violence and indiscriminate eviction. These attacks on the Nepalis reflected the growing apathy of State Governments and the local people towards the Nepalis in the region. Even where they were declared as a domiciled

⁴⁷ See B.P.Misra, '*Behind Gorkhaland Agitation*', **Mainstream**, Vol.25, No.7, Nov. 1, 1986, pp.15-20

⁴⁸ See K.L.Pradhan, '*Mizoram Gorkhas: Issues and Problems*', op cit no.13, pp.230-231

community, such as in Mizoram, they were targets of attacks by local boys. The local administration, meanwhile, stood silent witness to the full spate of attacks on Nepalis. As a result, the more educated began to reassess their political status and democratic rights in the region. This led to a search for and assertion of Indian Nepali identity in Northeast India.⁴⁹

The deplorable plight of the Nepalis in the Northeastern Region led to the formation of Pranta Parishad in North Bengal (April, 1980). The Pranta Parishad as per its Constitution was not a political party. It was just a political platform to press the demand for statehood of Darjeeling. It viewed the 'state' as a panacea for all linguistic, cultural and economic grievances of the Nepali people. During the 1982 State Assembly elections it made a vote boycott campaign to draw the attention of the India to the plight of the Nepalis. The vote boycott call was largely ineffective except in the Kalimpong sub-division where a meager 32 percent polling was recorded. However, it is important to note that the term 'Gorkhaland' was first used, though not very emphatically during the vote-boycott campaign of Pranta Parishad.⁵⁰

INDO NEPAL TREATY (1950) AND THE ISSUE OF GORKHA IDENTITY CRISIS

The Cold War politics that was to engulf the South Asia after the end of British imperialism posed serious challenge to India's security, status and the regional stability. It necessitated India to give a sound basis to her relations with its neighbouring countries. The hundred- year- old Rana Oligarchic political system was also in search of an external support in view of the violent anti-Rana movement by the democratic forces in Nepal. The Ranas' were certain that India alone could have lent that support. Besides, there were some common interest between India and Nepal that brought them together on the issue of concluding a treaty. The emergence of China as a strong communist power in 1949 made both India and China apprehensive of the communist infiltration in their region. It was in the context of these circumstances along with the geographical, economic and socio-cultural considerations that the Treaty of Peace and Friendship was signed

⁴⁹ Lopita Nath, op cit no.16.

⁵⁰ See Dyutis Chakraborty, op cit no.29

between the two sovereign and independent countries of India and Nepal on 31st July 1950 after mutual consultations and agreement.

The Treaty containing ten articles is a highly comprehensive document not only dealing with politico-strategic issues but also dealing with economic and social issues in the interest of the people of the two countries. Albeit the treaty has survived over half a century, it has become a source of irritants and obstacles particularly for the Indian Nepalis. According to them, the Treaty puts their national identity in jeopardy because they are always treated as nationals of the other country. The fact is that the earlier trends of migration found formal manifestation particularly in the Article VII of the Treaty of 1950 that states: 'The Government of India and Nepal agree to grant, on a reciprocal basis, to the nationals of one country in the territories of the other the same privileges in the matter of residence, ownership of property, participation in trade and commerce, movement and other privileges of a similar nature.'

Thus, Article VII of the Treaty provides for two-way migration of the nationals of one country in the territories of the other and provides the nationals of one country in the territories of the other the same privileges in the matters of residence, trade and commerce. It nullifies the requirement of a visa or passport for entry into either country.⁵¹ Nepal being one of the poorest and underdeveloped country in the world, by the end of 1950, one in every ten Nepalis had immigrated to India. The 1971 Census of India reports that there were 1.3 million Nepal-born Nepalis living in India.⁵² Thus once the Gorkhas and their families had established link between these hills and Nepal, the initial trickle of Nepalese became a surging stream.⁵³

The Article VII of the Indo-Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship (1950) however, proved to be a source of the mistaken identity of the Indian Nepalis. This is because it resulted into two sets of Nepali speaking people in India: (1)

⁵¹ B.C.Upreti, '*India-Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship: Nature, Problems and the Question of Identity of Indian Nepalis*', op cit no.13, pp.340-348

⁵² Anindita Dasgupta, '*Othering of the 'Not-So-Other': A Study of the Nepalis of Assam*', op cit no.1, pp.237

⁵³ Amena Passah, '*Nepalis in Meghalays: Diaspora and Identity*', op cit no.13, pp.243

descendants of those who settled in India during the British era and are bona fide citizens of India and, (2) the recently migrated Nepalis who are settled all over the country. As a result, the Nepalis of Indian origin suffer harassment on the suspicion that they are illegal migrants from Nepal as seen during the anti-foreigners movement in Assam and neighbouring Northeastern states of India. It was alleged by the Indian Nepalis that the argument that the Indian Nepalis have been enjoying the right to vote and accordingly the entry of their names in the voter's list will be conclusive evidence does not hold good as the Nepalese of Nepal origin readily have their names entered in the voter's list by the political leaders wanting to strengthen their political base in the region. Consequently the Indian Nepalis often suffer from oral abuse and questions doubting their identity. This kind of treatment, however, led the Nepalis of Indian origin to reassert their identity within the broader national framework. They have repeatedly demanded scrapping of the Article VII of the Indo-Nepal Treaty (1950) that is seen as the main factor jeopardizing their identity.

In the 21st century, memories of the 1980s incidents have been pushed to the back burner. Things have limped back to normal.⁵⁴ However, due to the similarity in appearance and language the Indian Nepalis are still mistaken as the Nepalis of Nepal origin. As a result, the Indian Nepalis do not enjoy privileges equivalent to the Indian nationals. For instance, the Nepali people living in Assam for generations are not issued the 'Permanent Residence Certificate' (PRC) by the District authorities and thus they are deprived of citizenship rights. Similarly, the Government of Mizoram, without giving any reasons, has stopped the issuance of the Other Backward Classes Certificates (OBC) to the bona fide children of Gorkha permanent settlers as a result of which the young Gorkhas are facing problems in various fields.⁵⁵ Indian Nepalis are also not eligible for state services as the 'sons of the soil' policy in the job avenues is prevalent in most areas.⁵⁶

To sum up, Indian Nepalis have been the part of India since the advent of the British colonialism in India. They were brought to India largely by the British

⁵⁴ See Amena Passah, op cit no.13, pp.244

⁵⁵ K.L. Pradhan, op cit no.13, pp.233

⁵⁶ Amena Passah, op cit no.13, pp.246

who recruited them as soldiers and labourers. They mingled with the native Indians by learning the local dialects and even entering into marital relationship with them. Amidst all this, they preserved their distinct culture, customs and traditions. In fact, they assimilated themselves and formed a collective identity distinct from that of Nepalese of Nepal origin. This identity of Nepalis as Indians suffered a setback due to the Clause VII of the Indo-Nepal Friendship Treaty (1950) by virtue of which Nepalese from Nepal poured in India in a large scale-giving rise to the problem of mistaken identity. The recognition of Nepali language as the additional official language for the district of West Bengal and subsequently in the VIII Schedule of the Indian Constitution also could not provide a permanent solution to the problem of identity crisis of the Indian Nepalis. They are continually treated as encroachers from Nepal and have become victims of humiliation and discrimination in India. Classical theorists like C.H. Cooley speaks of the 'looking glass self' where identities are formed based on what the individuals thinks he/she is perceived by others.⁵⁷ Accordingly, unless the Nepalis of Indian origin are accepted and treated as Indian nationals by other Indian communities, the problem of identity crisis of the community will remain unaddressed.

⁵⁷ Amena Passah, op cit no.13, pp.237.