

INDIAN NEPALIS

Issues and Perspectives

Edited by

T.B. Subba, A.C. Sinha, G.S. Nepal & D.R. Nepal

This compendium of twenty-five papers, presented at a national seminar, organized by the Indian Nepalis Study and Research Forum, addresses the problems of nationality of Indian Nepalis. Examining the conceptual and theoretical issues related to the identity of Indian Nepalis, the contributors deliberate on their search for Indian national identity without losing the regional and local perspectives that are equally important because Indian Nepalis live under different circumstances in different parts of India.

They also deal with the identity crisis of Indian Nepali youths, trafficking of Nepali women in India, herbal medicinal culture of Nepalis, and linkage between India and Nepal with special focus on history, literature and people.

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Prof. A. C. Sinha

Preface

The editors of this volume endeavoured to assemble representative members of the intelligentsia, opinion leaders, young and senior academics, authors, and concerned citizens for a three-day academic treat at Gangtok. These participants, who travelled from near and far away places, either presented papers in the academic sessions, or took part in panel discussions, or deliberated on the presentations in the various academic sessions. The organizers had a sense of satisfaction that the concerned members of the community and their well-wishers came forward and appreciated the efforts made to raise the relevant issues confronting the community. The editors are convinced that the conference was a right step at right time and with all their inadequacies it was the first effort of its type.

One point must be made very clear at the very outset is that the editors had no individual agenda of their own. Neither did they have uniformity of views on many issues among themselves, not the least because of disrespect to one another but because of a healthy tradition of their professional commitment and a belief in academic freedom. This becomes clear when one looks at their professional background of the editorial team. Professor T.B. Subba is an anthropologist by training and profession and Professor A.C. Sinha is an anthropologist by training and a sociologist by vocation. Professor Ghanshyam Nepal is an expert in Nepali language and literature and is a creative writer himself and D.R. Nepal is a trained government functionary. Perhaps that is why, while Subba has suggested, "Sakhaa" as the new nomenclature of the community, Sinha proposed the term 'Nepamul'/INO' as if they do not bother whether others would approve or not. Professor Ghanshyam Nepal, despite the fact that he heads a university department named "Nepali", would like the present nomenclature to continue only till an appropriate alternative nomenclature is developed. Thus, there is unanimity among the editors

that the search for a nomenclature other than Nepali and Gorkha must be pursued vigorously. For the purpose of the present volume, however, the authors have used the nomenclature of their choice and the editors have only tried to make the scripts more readable, intelligible, logical and thematic in presentation.

The conference was an eye-opener to the editors in the sense that a number of revelations took place during the three days. For example, the opinion makers and intelligentsia among the Indian Nepalis appear to be closed minded. They shied away from the debates, and whenever they took part in it, it was more of an advocacy of their stand points. They also appeared to be afraid of taking public stand on the issues of significance, as if they were afraid of conducting experiments.

The editors of this volume have presented perhaps the best that could happen at this juncture of the history of the Indian Nepalis. As one expects of an edited volume, all the articles are not equally strong in argument, documentation, or substance, but they all have something important to say about the Indian Nepalis. Above all, they all reflect some important aspects of the Indian Nepalis, their vibrancy as well as frustration, hopes as well as creativity, and internal churning as well as dialogue with the outside world. We are thankful to all the contributors, and participants, for responding to our detailed queries and bearing with our demands, which were all done with the spirit to make the book truly worthy of the community it is written about.

The editors are particularly grateful to Dr. Pawan Chamling, Hon'ble Chief Minister of Sikkim, for taking a keen interest in the conference and its output in the form of the present book. The conference on "Identity and Nationality of the Indian Nepalis: Issues and Perspectives" was held on April 20-22, 2006 at Chintan Bhawan, Gangtok, Sikkim. We are beholden to the various functionaries of the Government of Sikkim for the support and the Indian Nepali Study and Research Forum, Gangtok, and its president, K.P. Adhikari for constituting the organizing committee for co-coordinating the event. We are grateful to the Indian Council of Social Science Research, North-Eastern Regional Centre, Shillong for funding the conference kits and to the Government of Sikkim for taking care of the remaining and more substantial expenses towards making the national conference possible. This book is based on the papers presented at the conference but includes, fortunately or unfortunately, less than one third of them. We could not publish all the papers because they either did not meet our expectations of quality and standard or we could not arrange to translate them into English. A few of them were left out during the

editing process. We are sorry for those participants whose articles did not find place in the volume. However, we do appreciate their efforts and contributions to the discussions during the various academic sessions. Similarly, we are sorry to the panelists of the two panels we had organised for not being able to include their contributions in the volume in spite of our best efforts. Among the Sikkimese intellectuals, we appreciate the valuable contributions made by Shri C.D. Rai and Padmashri Sanu Lama. Lastly, the authorities, faculty and students of Sikkim Government College, Tadong were of great help to us in bringing order in the conference halls and conducting the proceedings. We cannot thank them enough.

Finally, we thank the Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi, for publishing the book in record time and keeping the price within affordable limits for most Indian Nepalis.

T.B. Subba
A.C. Sinha
G.S. Nepal
D.R. Nepal

Prof. A. C. Sinha

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Section 1

Conceptual and Theoretical Issues

Introduction

A.C. SINHA

Man as a social being is by nature gregarious and spends most of his life along with other beings in perusing his daily chores. While doing so, he forms a variety of social circles, which turn out stronger, enduring and even binding on him. Family, friendship, neighbourhood, kinship, clubs, associations, and many such formations provide support system and in the process they become so critical for men and women that they live and die for the sake of these social groupings. Ethnicity, nationalism and statehood may be seen as various formations of such human existence today.

Indians of Nepalese Origin or the Nepamul Bharatiya, like other such human multitudes, are engaged in series of activities among themselves and along with other social entities in the vast multi-ethnic Indian Union. Being members of the Indian Union gives them a series of privileges including equal treatment guaranteed by the Indian Constitution. As citizens of India, they have fundamental rights such as free movement within the Indian Union, freedom to choose a vocation, settle down and exercise political rights to vote and get elected to various elective posts in the country. The structure of the Indian Union, divided among the states and union territories, is such that Nepamul Bharatiya feel handicapped, as their name is willy-nilly associated with and tagged to another sovereign state, Nepal. The very nomenclature of the community creates confusion even among them and their neighbours. They are invariably accused of being Nepalese, the citizens of Nepal, who are then charged to be usurping rights and privileges meant for the bonafide Indians. The protestations that they have been living in India for generations and were born and brought up in India are not taken seriously,

as open border between the two countries does not ensure an automatic citizenship.

Puzzled Nepamul Bharatiya cast a glance around them and discover that they are underdogs in India. Except for the vague notion of some distant Nepalese ancestry and their common lingua franca with the Nepalese—Nepali—they do not have many things in common even between themselves. They have significant social, religious, linguistic and cultural variations within them. So who are the INO or the Nepamul Bharatiya? What holds them together? How do they identify themselves individually and collectively? How do ‘others’ identify them? What should be appropriate identity and nomenclature for the Nepamul Bharatiya?

There are a number of real and putative reasons for the INO’s nationality becoming a suspect. And for that the common INO not only suffers, but it also confuses him of his status as an Indian. If he is an Indian what type of Indian is he? Like a Marathi, an Oriya or an Assamese? If it is so, then why do ‘other’ Indians not treat him like they treat an Indian Marathi, an Indian Oriya and an Indian Assamese? The above Indian communities have their home lands (states) within Indian Union, but why do the Nepamul Bharatiya not have their homeland in the Indian Union? Who gives homeland to them? Are they like the Parsis, Sindhis, and Anglo-Indians, who do not have their homelands in India? But these communities are highly developed and economically powerful unlike the community in question here. These and many other questions continue to beg answer. The Nepamul Bharatiya are no doubt Indians, but what type of Indians are they?

With a view to answering some of the above questions, it is imperative to explain terms like ethnicity, nationality, and state prevalent in the contemporary academic discourse.

Ethnicity and Ethnic Identity

The term ‘ethnic’ is of Greek origin meaning ‘a community of common descent’, or ‘a kinship group linked by ties of blood’. Max Weber defines ethnic groups as ‘human groups (other than kinship group), which cherish a belief in their common origins of such a kind that it provides basis for the creation of a community’. His argument centres on ‘a set of beliefs, and not on any objective features of group membership such as shared language, religion, and especially biological traits associated with the everyday understanding of race. It is this sense of common ancestry, that is vital, but the identification with the shared origin is largely, if not wholly,

fictitious'.¹ For ethnicity to come about the groups must have a minimum of contacts with each other, and they must entertain ideas of each other as being culturally different from themselves. Moreover, the term 'ethnicity' refers to relationships between groups whose members consider themselves distinctive, and these groups may be ranked hierarchically within a society'.

Stefan Wolf finds two distinct schools illustrating the aspects of ethnicity. The so-called primordial school of ethnicity holds that ethnicity is so deeply engrained in human history and experience that it cannot be denied that it exists, objectively and subjectively, and that it should, therefore, be considered a fact of life in relations between individuals and groups, who all have an ethnic identity. The instrumentalist's school of ethnicity argues that ethnicity is by no means an indisputable historical fact. Rather, instrumentalists suggest that ethnicity is first and foremost a resource in the hands of leaders to mobilize followers in pursuits of other interests such as physical security, economic gain, or political power.² What both the schools agree on is that ethnicity has a number of tangible aspects such as common history, customs, traditions, language or religion? These are important components of an individual's ethnic identity because these markers make it possible to establish differences not only between individuals, but also between groups.

Sociological tradition displays a conceptual opposition between rationality and emotion. However, Steve Fenton notes that in popular discourse there is little doubt that ethnic attachments and identities are seen as belonging to the realm of sentiments and 'belonging as a psychological bond'. Ethnic sentiments may be seen as not only non-rational, but also as defining rationally—that is, despite the gains to be made by acting in a non-ethnic way, people choose to act ethnically.³ It is interesting to note that prior to current ethnic studies, it was Soviet anthropologists and American sociologists, who pioneered ethnic studies in their respective countries. While Soviet ethnographers found the study of ethnos at the local and regional levels politically safe enough in the then USSR, Nathan Glazer and Daniel Moynihan in USA popularized ethnicity through their famous work, *Beyond the Melting Pot* in 1970s. For Glazer and Moynihan ethnicity is real and it is the felt basis of political and social actions.

Ilan Peleg drew some general conclusions on ethnicity after evaluating the 'theoretical, comparative and historical analysis of pluralist regimes. They may be identified as the following:

- (1) In contemporary world, majority political elites in ethnically divided societies are under increasing pressure to treat minorities equally, democratically, and sensitively. Heavy-handed ethnic oppressions are almost universally condemned and it is likely to backfire.
- (2) The pressure on political elites to find new solutions for ethnic problems is especially intense when there is resistance (often among both, majority and minority) to either assimilation or integration. Consociational solutions then become attractive. These are solutions that focus on difference-management rather than difference-elimination and many (moves) are group based.
- (3) A liberal solution to the ethnic dilemma—granting all individuals equality under the law—is a necessity but frequently insufficient condition for long term stability in a society plagued by long term division.
- (4) What is often required in divided societies plagued by violence is a transformative constitutional settlement granting the major groups in society collective rights: language rights, equal or at least significant share in the polity's economic resources, protected political representation, etc.
- (5) Creative solutions of that nature are, of course, not a firm guarantee for long term political stability. In fact, several consociational deals have collapsed over last 35 years. But without consociational solutions, all hopes for stability are gone.
- (6) The challenge to consociationism is likely to come from two places:
 - (a) Radical groups within the minority that reject any deal with the 'oppressive majority' and demand full independence.
 - (b) Conservative groups within the majority that are afraid, often irrationally, of losing power and, even more so, of allowing the polity to change its fundamental character.⁴

Writing in early 1990s, the then Director General of the Anthropological Survey of India K.S. Singh found ethnicity in India generally being interpreted as recognition of rights of the community to maintain its identity, of pluralism, a return to the roots of life and culture, for a participative democracy, and for a genuine federal and decentralized polity. Furthermore, he noted that 'ethnicity in India generally means tribal ethnicity, which is largely concerned with articulation of tribal aspirations for political power through creation of autonomous areas or separate state'.⁵

Nobel laureate Amartya Sen terms human identification as 'solitarist view'. For him it is thought to be formed by the membership to a single social group categorized in terms of religion, caste, class, language, ethnicity, nationality or civilization. He diagnoses that it is the solitarist view that has come to shape and influence much of the dynamics of polity and identity-based violence, especially because one's identity is constructed and sustained by a series of contrasts and exclusions. To further their own selfish ends, politicians, priests and fundamentalists viciously cultivate violence, create factions and set people against one another. Violence is often used not only to hurt, terrorize and kill those who are perceived as enemies or outsiders, but also as a strategy to increase the popular support base for extremist ideology and to convert and convince the moderates within their fold. However, when the governments and their apparatus such as the police and the armed forces are inefficient, partisan or on the verge of collapse, people are forced to turn to identify factions to fill up the lacuna.⁶

Sen proposes a theory of identity, which should be informed and enriched by two important traits: (i) plural and multi-layered identity, and (ii) "reasoned choice" in prioritizing the relevance of various identities. Firstly, the answer to "who are we" and "who are they" may have different levels and layers. In his view it is wrong to define multiple and plural nature of identities in terms of single, unchanging essence. This paves the way for a "miniaturization" of humanity, as if every one is segregated into separate little caves, emerging only to attack each other. It also amounts to a politics of singular identity, which is incapable of appreciating the fact that human beings are able to rise above narrow confines of group identities in order to recognize and respond to fellow human beings. Secondly, by "reasoned choice" in prioritizing the relevance of the various identities, he suggests a catalogue of identities to describe, self and others, but not all of the identities enjoy the same status. Consciously or unconsciously, these identities that a person has come to share acquire a hierarchy of importance and relevance.

Nation and Nationality

The concept of nationality shares with ethnicity the vague notion of a common descent among its members. Benedict Anderson defines nation as 'an imagined community, both inherently limited and sovereign'. The idea of a nation is at first sight a unifying idea across the segmental and regional divides. Historian William H. McNeil argued that nations and

nationalism were peculiar phenomena of modern European history from about 1789 to 1945, which he termed as the Age of Western Modernity, when the idea of national unity held sway and modern nation-state was accepted as a political norm. In his view, before and after that phase, poly-ethnic hierarchy was the norm in the history of Europe.⁷ It was about 1700 AD that the idea of independent nation-states based on ethnic homogeneity emerged in Europe. There were four factors responsible for such a development: (i) influence of classical humanism, and hence civic solidarity found in classical city-states like Athens, Sparta and Republic of Rome, capturing the imagination of the intellectuals, (ii) growth of reading public verses in standardized vernacular languages such as French, English, German and the like forming the future governing elite, (iii) rapid growth of population in Europe fuelling revolutionary discontent among surplus labour, and (iv) emphasis on modern infantry drill indicative of state allied new sense of civil solidarity and fraternity.

Ernest Gellner believes that nations should have state systems, which give formal expression and autonomy to their nationhood. Conversely, states are nations composed of people with a claim to common culture and ancestry⁸ and nationalism is the doctrine of promoting the correspondence of nation and state. Gellner raises three questions with respect to nation-states with a bearing on ethnicity. The first is that the concept of nation raises the same questions as the ethnic groups: how far do we regard nation as grounded in social reality and how far is it the construction or invention of political imagination of the groups whose interest they serve? Second, the formation of the states as nation-states implies the cultural definition of an ethnic majority, that is, within the concept of nation is an idea, which may be more or less explicit, of who and what composes the nation. In a narrow ancestral or even biological idea of the nation, either multiethnicity within the nation is excluded, or minority ethnicities are defined as less than full members. Third, the construction of purportedly homogeneous nation-states has never been perfect. If ethnic identities define nations, ethnicity may define citizenship within nation-states.

Wolf notes that for states and ethnic groups alike, territories possess certain values in itself, which may include ownership of natural resources, goods and services produced by the populations living in the territory, and military and strategic advantages derived from it. Not for nothing, wars have been fought over territories since ancient times. Moreover, nationalism is not necessarily tied to ethnicity. From this perspective, one may distinguish between civic and ethnic varieties of nationalism.

This differentiation often goes hand in hand with a moral judgment: civil nationalism is deemed to be more virtuous and liberal, whereas ethnic nationalism is generally seen as dangerous and explosive.⁹

Moreover, the core nationalist ideology is the conviction that the nations, and the state that represents the nation, embody a people's deepest and most abiding values that destiny of individuals is indissolubly linked to the fate of their undivided loyalty and devotion. Moreover, nationalism has given birth to three different versions, each implying different structure of the state to which it corresponds. The first is the ethno-nationalism, the belief that any people that aspires to political self-determination and self-rule is a nation and as such is entitled to independent statehood. The second version of it is identified with civic nationalism, a territorial concept, defining the nation as all persons regardless of ethnic provenance, who accept the duties and responsibilities of citizenship. What binds them together as a political community is not their ethnic origin, but rather their commitment to a common set of political institutions, political values and way of life. Third, in a multi-national state that includes two or more nations, syncretic nationalism is an ideology that attempts to construct a new, inclusive national sentiment that will subordinate and eventually supplant the original national sentiments of its component peoples. Bi-national and multi-national states encompass within their boundaries two or more peoples, who consider them to be distinct nations, but choose voluntarily or are compelled to function as component of a larger state.

Nation and State

Nationalism is, in view of Ernest Gellner, primarily a political principle, which presupposes that political and national units should ideally be the same. Nationalism as a sentiment and as a movement arouses anger on its violation and satisfaction on its fulfilment. Furthermore, nationalism is the theory of political legitimacy, which is frequently asserted in an ethical and universalistic spirit. Naturally, these stipulations lead us to a discussion on state. And for that, one naturally turns to Max Weber's celebrated definition of the state as that agency within society, which possesses the monopoly of legitimate violence, i.e., only the state has absolute legitimate coercive power with a view to establish social order by controlling the violence. Furthermore, social management all through historical times helped the ethnic groups and nations come under institutionalized state systems. Today state is a universal institution spread all over the world and its various aspects are well established and

recognized. Modern state has a distinctly defined territory, legally identified body of citizens, a constitutionally sanctioned government and an internationally recognized sovereignty to take its own decisions within its own boundaries. It is man in society for whom the institution of state has been envisaged, but in the process, it has emerged much larger and powerful in its structure, reducing him to insignificance.

Lord Bhikhu Parikh, while incorporating the above points, reformulates them and also makes some additions, which qualifies the state systems more elaborately:¹⁰

- (1) The state is fixed in space. It is identified with and claims proprietary jurisdiction over a specific area.
- (2) It is sovereign, that is, it is an autonomous source of all legal authority exercised within its territory, no area of social life within its bounds in principle is immune to its jurisdiction, and it is not subject to the legal control of an external or internal power.
- (3) It is formally independent of society, and mediates the relation between the individual and the society on the one hand and the government on the other.
- (4) The modern state is a legal institution, constituted in terms of and speaking in the language of the general and uniform laws of varying degrees of generality and of legal force.
- (5) It is not a community of communities but as association of socially abstract individuals, who constitute its ultimate ontological units, enjoy equal rights and obligations, and are subject to a uniform system of law.
- (6) It enjoys the monopoly of the authority to use physical force.
- (7) The major institutions of the modern states are professionalized and are run like closed corporations by trained men and women in a technical language.
- (8) As an autonomous institution, the state relies on its own institutional resources to perform such functions as the maintenance of order, punishment of crime, provision of education and basic social welfare services.
- (9) It is constructed and run from top downwards rather than bottom upwards as it is expected in an organization that began as an apparatus of ruling under absolute monarchy.

In the light of the above discussion, one finds that the Indian Union is a universally recognized state, divided sub-nationally among 'states'

and union territories. Constitutionally, it is a federal state system with a strong central authority. It prides itself on its multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, plural and secular credentials. It has made special legal and constitutional provisions for enlistment of the weaker segments of the Indian society by identifying them as Scheduled Tribes, Scheduled Castes and Other Backward Classes. The state claims to treat regional, linguistic and religious minorities with care. Its constitution guarantees fundamental rights to its citizens and it is committed to an over-all improvement of the living conditions of the Indian masses through 'directive principles' of the Constitution. The state does not discriminate among its citizens on the basis of ethnicity, language, religion, region or race. Formally, it is a secular, socialist republic committed to the welfare of the Indian masses.

Identity and Nationality of the INO

In view of the above discussion, where do the INOs stand? Are they a distinct ethnic group? How do they identify themselves? How are they identified by others? Are they collectively an ethnic group or are they separately distinct ethnic groups? Are there symptoms/attributes that suggest that they have graduated to a level of nation such as Naga/ Assamiya/Bengali within the state? Are INOs consciously engaged in carving out a distinct Indian identity? Have they charted out a vision for their future in India? If it is so, what does it look like? What are its attributes?

The emergence of nation-states called India and Nepal has created this anomalous status of the INOs, or Nepamul Bharatiya, who are also known as 'Gorkhas' and/or 'Nepalis'. The Nepalese and the Indian Nepalis have been travelling and residing in various parts of India since time immemorial in pursuit of trade, pilgrimage and other vocations. In the past, concepts of state boundary and nationality were flexible enough to overlook the migrants. However, the British colonialists, who adopted a deliberate policy of large-scale recruitment of the Nepalese in the armed forces and constabulary, coolie corps, plantation and forest labour force, also gave birth to the crisis of INOs. From the second quarter of nineteenth century, the British opened up Darjeeling, Sikkim, Duars, Bhutan, and Assam for the Nepalese settlement. And that was the beginning of an organized colonization and extensive presence of the Nepalese in certain pockets of Northeast India.

Most Nepamul Bharatiya writers from Northeast India claim that there was a close ethnic link between the region and Nepal in the past. In

their treatment, history of Nepal remained static and ancient Northeast meant the Brahmaputra valley at the most. The problem is that they are not able to prove their point through any conclusive historical data or through a genealogical reconstruction. So, ancient ties remain at best notional. Even if it was historically true, it does not contradict the fact that extensive immigration of the Nepamul Bharatiya occurred during the British period, especially after the Anglo-Nepalese War of 1814-15 and precisely after the Anglo-Burmese War of 1826. They did come as soldiers of fortune to begin with and their settlements could be located on strategically significant landmarks around the British settlements and army cantonments. In the much quoted phrase of the Duke of Wellington, these soldiers from the martial race were, in fact, 'men from the lower classes, who could be bullied, flogged and drilled into subordinating their humanity to rhythm of the guns'.¹¹ The second set of immigrants were the herdsmen, graziers, dairymen, lumber jacks and other sundry men, who could not be employed in the armed forces. Laws of migration were flexible and issue of nationality was not at all as nagging as it is now. Immigrants, though favoured by the colonial rulers, had to work hard under trying circumstances. Their settlements in the region are success stories of human struggle over natural and man-made obstacles. No doubt, among the coloured underdogs, Nepalese were the favoured ethnic stock of the white colonial rulers. Willy-nilly, they came to be identified as the "sahibs' faithful boys". But it must be added that there were other ethnic groups, which competed for such a distinction.

In the aftermath of 1979 anti-foreigner agitation waged by the All Assam Students' Union (AASU), a seminar was held on "Violence and Conflict in North East India" in June 1980 in Shillong where I presented a paper on the Nepamul Bharatiya in Northeast India. I concluded that 'the Nepalese may get themselves organized to preserve, propagate, and even increase their ethnic solidarity. And this newly acquired Nepalese solidarity would naturally clash with the heightened expectations of the host communities in North East India'.¹²

What hurts the Nepamul sentiments most is to learn that a democratic and predominantly Hindu India does not accord them the status of cultural associate communities like Marathi, Kannad, and Gujarati. The problem is this: India treats the INOs largely the way Nepal treats NIOs in Nepal. Worse still, those born and brought up in India and the immigrants from Nepal are both accorded the same status as a peripheral community, with an opaque status of some one so close, but still not meaningfully connected.¹³ Hence, often angry demands are made by the Nepamul

Bharatiya to do away Clause 7 of the Indo-Nepalese Peace and Friendship Treaty, 1950. It appears that the Nepamul Bharatiya presume that once they are separated from the immigrant Nepalese, they will automatically be treated at par with other Indians. One hopes that such expectation comes true, but prejudice, social distance/closeness etc. are irrational and it cannot be formally erased over night.

Echoing the above sentiments, T.B. Subba notes that Nepamul Bharatiya in Northeast India will have to struggle as other Indians to find space for them: 'The political aspirations of the Nepalis in Northeast India are therefore woven around the struggle for equal economic and political rights as other Indian citizens. Such aspirations have often taken very long to be fulfilled or have remained unfulfilled even today. The most important reason for this is lack of a strong ethnic solidarity among them. Their ethnicity is actually much weaker than what is made out to be. The historical, racial, cultural, spatial, and now class and occupational, variations have been successful in acting as a deterrent to the emergence of a strong ethnic solidarity among them'.¹⁴

Painting rather a depressing picture of the INO's existence in general and in Northeast India in particular, Subba warns the community to get ready for a long drawn struggle for getting their due delivered. 'With more and more indigenous people competing for the various limited resources in the region, the Nepalis will have to prepare themselves to face more hostile environment in future. The possibilities of such hostilities growing in future are fairly certain and they will increasingly have to remain at the mercy of local communities and state governments. New Delhi is not only physically very far, but it is psychologically insensitive. The Nepalis will learn to adapt and live where they are, but not leave (the region). And leave, if they must, they will return soon after, as they did in Assam in 1979 and in Meghalaya in 1987'.¹⁵

After examining the implications of citizenship and nationality of the Nepalis in Southasia, Michael Hutt finds that a Nepali or a Gorkha born in India is liable to be assumed to be foreign nationals or immigrants in India and all types of sinister political motives are imputed to their leaders for that. Interestingly, he links status of Nepamul Bharatiya in India to that of the Madhesis in Nepal, which none of the Nepamul Bharatiya leaders has considered so far. This is a point that demands serious consideration for the future of the inter-ethnic relationship in Southasia, and what the volume does in this regard is only symbolic of what should be done. Though his concern is much broader, he concludes: 'The simple fact of the matter is that a Newar or a Limbu born in

Darjeeling, Bhutan or Assam will always be considered “Nepali” , even if he or she adopts the label “Gorkha” or “Lhotshampa”, just as Bihari or Marwari, who has no home other than Kathmandu, will always be considered “Indian”. Through out this century, Indian Nepalis have struggled to forge an identity for themselves that distinguishes them from the Nepalese of Nepal, so that they might emerge as a distinct ethnic group within India for, ... ‘ethnic identity had become an organizational form, a weapon, a tool. And/or a means for the attainment of goals’.¹⁶

The term Lhotshampa has a distinct meaning today and is understood in the same sense by the people who are so referred to, as by the Royal Government of Bhutan, which coined the term. It is, however, unfortunate that although the word was coined in 1975, it came in currency only after the Lhotshampas’ flight from Bhutan to the refugee camps in Nepal in early 1990s. The academic, litterateurs, public men, etc all now agree that it has clarified the situation so far as the identity of the Bhutanese of Nepalese extraction is concerned.

Similar clarification is awaited for the INOs. Efforts were made in the past to find a more appropriate term that would largely be acceptable to all INOs and carry adequate, precise, and unambiguous understanding of the community. Subba informs that terms such as Bhargoli and Bharpali were suggested, but they could not catch the imagination of the people. He refers to two more terms: Gorkha and Nepali and describes their context, exponents and opponents.¹⁷ Some of us may recollect the acrimonious panel discussion on ‘crisis of nomenclature’ in the community on April 21, 2006 at Chintan Bhawan, Gangtok. It is apparent that the community is emotionally and politically divided on the issue. There are strong exponents of term ‘Nepali’ across India and elsewhere and there are equally strong supporters of ‘Gorkha,’ especially in the Darjeeling hills. The issue became so emotive that a senior and highly respected academic from the community taking part in the panel discussion felt like signing an affidavit saying that he was neither a Nepali nor a Gorkha. Both Gorkha and Nepali have their strong and weak aspects and it is indeed difficult to resolve the issue.

The writer of these lines has, in course of his researches in Sikkim, Bhutan and the INO, added to the confusion by injudiciously using ‘Nepalese’ to refer on the INOs. In his recent study, he has tried to rectify the unintended conceptual injury to the theme.¹⁸ He notes an utter confusion about the term ‘Nepalese’ in literature, every day use and government documents. Naturally, the term ‘Nepalese’ denotes the people or language of Nepal. But the problem is that the term is used in a very

loose sense, referring to any body who speaks Nepali or whose ancestors had been 'Nepalese'. This situation is not confined to the laymen; even the governments of India, Nepal and Bhutan do not maintain a consistent difference between the 'Nepalese' and the Indian or Bhutanese of Nepalese origin. Further more, the members of the community, i.e., the progenies of Nepalese origin themselves add to the problem, as they have not been able to evolve a consensus on appropriate nomenclature for their community. And, there are many 'Nepalese' in Sikkim, Bihar, Uttaranchal and West Bengal who or whose ancestors had not migrated from Nepal and they had been residents of these regions for centuries.

Awareness has dawned since 1970s among the INOs that they must display their distance from the 'Nepalese', the citizens of Nepal. And efforts were made to coin terms describing the INOs as Bhargoli, Bharpali, and Gorkha, but till date consensus has eluded the community. I used the term Nepamul Bharatiya in 2001 but it has not been accepted either. Many of Nepamul Bharatiya scholars and political activists use the term 'Nepali' or 'Gorkha' but unfortunately these two terms have polarized the community in two opposite and even somewhat hostile camps. I think the term 'Nepali' has problems on account of the similarity between the Nepalis in India, Bhutan and Nepal. Whatever is the new proposed term must not send confusing signals and it should be, if not universally, largely acceptable to most of the people concerned. The term 'Gorkha' is strongly projected by people of Darjeeling and a regional political party called Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF). It is associated with the Gorkha (Gurkha) soldiers, Gorkha kingdom of Shah dynasty, subjects of Gorkha kingdom, followers of Baba Gorakhnath, and Gorkha watchmen in the Indian metropolis. So, in this chaotic situation, I have referred to the people in question as INO or Nepamul Bharatiya.

History of the INOs

There were several push factors such as the grinding poverty and repressive regime in the Rana-ruled Nepal and a set of pull factors like jobs in armed forces, plantations, forests and a variety of opportunities in the urban centres and a relatively better, secured, and varied prospect compared to Nepal for creating a category I call INO. A considerable number of high caste Nepalese had moved as herdsmen to the marginal forestlands in Northeast India as graziers. In course of time, they turned out to be the industrious peasant cultivators and pioneering dairymen of the region. No doubt, some of the migrants found it more rewarding to

stay back in their new place of work in India. When the British withdrew from India in 1947, they left behind a legacy of the Nepalese settlers in Northeast India. This legacy had two types: one in uniform and another in *mufti*.

Unfortunately for the Nepamul Bharatiya, the enlightened Indian public opinion invariably saw them standing behind the British colonialist masters during the Indian freedom struggle. Naturally, the first crop of policy makers tended to develop an attitude of ambivalence towards them. Moreover, lack of an articulate and effective leadership from within, who could have informed the Indian public opinion on the contributions of the community, further added to the postponement of a positive assessment of Nepamul Bharatiya in the eyes of Indian policy makers. And thus, the Nepamul Bharatiya were taken for granted as collaborators in the process of Indian development, and at the worst, an irritant, but they were never considered as a threat to the Indian cause. To add to their woes, Indo-Nepalese Treaty of Friendship, 1950 stipulated that Indians and Nepalese would be permitted to travel, work and settle in each other's country in an unrestricted way. This provision further confused the Indian masses about the century-old Nepamul Bharatiya with transient Nepalese seasonal migrants.

The Nepamul Bharatiyas are alleged to have double citizenship: Nepalese and Indian. It is argued that the Nepamul Bharatiyas invariably look to Nepal as their cultural and social fount and their loyalty to Nepal is unflinching. They are also suspected to be forerunners of the 'Greater Nepal' ambition, nursed by an insignificant segment of the Nepalese. In this context, it will not be out of place to remind our readers the issue of recognition of Nepali language by the Government of India. It was kept hanging for over a decade because of the denial of a reciprocal gesture of according recognition to Hindi, the official national language of the Indian Republic, by the then Royal Government of Nepal. There may be more of this type of litany, but the sane voice among the Nepamul Bharatiya have been ultimately able to convince their fellow Indian citizens of the genuineness of their cause and their concern for the country.

1970s brought a mixed bag of events with far-reaching developments for Northeast India in general and for the INOs in particular: emergence of Bangladesh, UN membership for the Royal Government of Bhutan, death of King Mahendra, anti-Chogyal agitation in Sikkim and its merger with India and a variety of ethnic assertion movements. It was also a period in Indian history that had two "wooden" prime ministers with limited patience to understand the nuances of Northeast India. And thus,

they further added to the ethnic muddle already existing by their careless comments on the events and issues without assessing the consequences. One of the outcomes of this confused and uncared scenario was a series of ethnic expulsions of the Nepamul Bharatiyas from the region, GNLF movement in Darjeeling and flight of the Lhotshampas from Bhutan in late 1980s to India and refugee camps in Nepal.

What resulted in was a massive human tragedy. The Nepamul Bharatiya and Lhotshampas suffered untold misery: violence against their life and assets, eviction and forced expulsion from their home and hearth, and denial of basic human rights as ordinary citizens. The community found no effective voice of protest in their favour against their sufferings. They found no spokesmen to articulate their grievances and no body raised the issue of their continuous expulsion from their home and hearth on the floor of the Indian parliament. Moreover, otherwise known for their investigative skills, the Indian communication media also maintained a deafening silence by their near non-coverage. Public men, media, intelligentsia, political parties, civic bodies and other agencies of the open society and vibrant Indian democracy maintained a distance from the plight of the Nepamul Bharatiya and Lhotshampas, as though they are not even human beings. Otherwise, how do we explain the non-concern of the Indian intellectuals and civil society about a hundred and twenty-five thousand Lhotshampa refugees languishing for the last two decades in the eastern Nepal refugee camps?

Why This Book?

Some of us at North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong, decided in mid-1990s to hold a seminar with a view to assemble concerned activists, academics, intellectuals among Nepamul Bharatiyas to assess their existing scenario in Northeast India. We consciously left Sikkim and Darjeeling and other INO-inhabited areas, as those places have their histories and predicaments different from those living in the region in question.

When the event actually took place despite all odds it was an experience to witness the enthusiasm of the first generation young scholars from among the INOs of the region. About two dozen presentations were made and there were a number of issues, which were debated and we came to certain consensus and there were others on which no agreement could be reached. There were senior intellectuals among the participants, who could prevail on a number of emotive issues projected by the young

impatient participants. The proceedings were conducted in English and Nepali and there were informed and occasionally emotional deliberations. With a view to disseminating the contents of the seminar to a larger audience, we decided to publish it in English. The proceedings were edited and were published in course of time.¹⁹ That publication turned out to be the first authentic document on the life, literature, history, culture, and economy of the community.

One of the views of the participants of the Shillong seminar was to hold an all India INO meet to deliberate on their identity and nationality on a national level. Thus, a seminar was conceived and organized in Gangtok in April 2006, which would not be successful without the financial and other supports of the government of Sikkim and special patronage of the chief minister, Dr. Pawan Chamling. The present book comprises about one third of the papers presented at the national conference held in Gangtok.

We the editors worked hard to bring out this book because we are convinced that it will fill up a vital gap in the literature on the INOs. It is a fact that no one knows how many Nepalis live in India today—the claim ranging from 5 to 10 millions—but the number is certainly substantial in states like Sikkim, West Bengal, and Assam compared to their population in Meghalaya, Nagaland, Mizoram, and Manipur in Northeast India and Uttaranchal in central Himalayas. The reasons for their migration and settlement are different in different parts of the country, although there are some common strands as well, of which the British admiration for them as brave soldiers in war and hardy and loyal workers in peace times was perhaps the most important. The duration of their settlement also varies from place to place, group to group, and from family to family. So does their legal status as citizens of India, the privileges they have access to, their vocations, their adaptation to local languages and cultures, etc. So also does the perception of the neighbouring communities about them in general, their attitude and character, their identity and culture, their languages and the Nepali lingua-franca, and so on. There is so much of racial, linguistic, historical, and cultural variation in them that it is difficult to make any generalisation about them at all India level. It is not possible to say anything with any degree of confidence until one knows about their number, status, problems, apprehensions, predicament, and opportunities from different parts of India. It is also important to know why they are often evicted en masse from Northeast India and what challenges they face in Darjeeling-Sikkim Himalayas where they are numerically significant.

This book builds on the 'red book' on Northeast India, as the book edited by A.C. Sinha and T.B. Subba are referred to but seeks to widen its scope in terms of issues it seeks to debate on all-India level. Two most important but inter-related issues are their identity and nationality. Howsoever old their settlement in a particular place may be they are categorised together with the ones who arrive from Nepal on any day in search of seasonal employment or for recruitment in India's military or para-military forces. Their claims to historicity, Kirata identity, and sacrifice of lives for their motherland called India, their adherence to a different Nepali dialect from that of Nepal, and the prominent traces of local cultures in their cultures are not at all enough to stake their claim for Indian nationality. They are religiously branded as "foreigners" and "migrants" and deprived even of some basic human rights like right to life and livelihood in times of ethnic conflict between them and their neighbours in Northeast India. They are nicknamed *Dajus* (coolies or porters), *Bahadurs* (chowkidars) and *Kanchhas* (household servants). If they raise any demands—literary, political or economic—they are often told to go to Nepal, as the Governor of Assam did recently. The Indian media, particularly the film media that has such a large presence in Indian psyche, is rarely neutral to them.

Similar is perhaps the situation of the Nepalis of Indian origin in Nepal, and in certain respects perhaps even worse, although in terms of physical eviction they are certainly better off than the Nepalis in Northeast India. Whatever may be comparative status of them their fates are interconnected, as if by an umbilical cord. What the former suffer from in India the latter suffer from in Nepal. In other words, the issues of identity and nationality not only engage the minds of the Nepalis in India but also the Indians in Nepal. Will they ever be full-fledged citizens of the countries they are living in even if they qualify to be so constitutionally? Will they form a category called "constitutional citizens" whereas they remain foreigners, migrants and outsiders in the psyche of the "real citizens"? The present book seeks to find some answers, no matter how tentative, to such questions as well.

Organization of the Book

In all, the book contains 26 articles, including Introduction and Conclusion. There are three foreigners, seven women, and rest of the authors hail from 10 states of the Indian Union. The book has been divided into five sections on the basis of the thrust of the articles and concerns of

the authors, though there are chapters that may conveniently be put in sections other than where they are put in this volume.

The first section is titled "Conceptual and Theoretical Issues", which includes five chapters that address the key issues of the conference. For instance, the first chapter by Michael Hutt takes recourse to about half a dozen literary sources, informs the readers how Lil Bahadur Chhetri (*Basai*), Lainsingh Bangdel (*Muluk Bahiro*), Govinda Raj Bhattarai (*Muglan*), Ganusingh Gurung (*Yatra*) and Indra Bahadur Rai (*Hami Jastai Mainaki Ama*) have tackled the sense of sufferings in Nepal, a picture of better opportunity in India, a sense of migration and a sense of insecurity. He beautifully ends his presentation with Agam Singh Giri's lyrical poem expressing a sense of pride in being a Nepali. In the next chapter, Pravesh Jung Golay addresses three related themes pertaining to Nepali ethnic identity: the way human beings formulate and classify 'things' encountered, relationship between class and identity, and latter's identification by 'others' and one's situatedness in terms of history.

In this context, Goutam Biswas takes up another aspect of identity formation. He talks about a shift from convergence of ideas to lived-in experience in ethics of communication and suggests that the narratives of Nepalis should be seen as 'little narratives'. And for that he cites Pawan Chamling's 'Sky of Nationality' (*Rastriyatako Akash*) as an example. Bidhan Golay finds the question of identity saddled with academic and political discourses. He finds two levels of Gorkha identity: an individual Gorkha as an inseparable part of the colonial discourse and community's historical experience of de-territorialized subjectivity leading to two conflicting impulses of primordiality and demands of modern nation state. By taking recourse to history and literature, he pleads for 'a post-national' or a Southasian Gorkha identity. Tapasya Thapa makes a distinction between 'being' and 'belonging' as a Nepali in India. The author finds Nepalis constituting a minority without any privilege of being a minority like Muslims and Anglo-Indians. She argues that unless the community knows what constitutes being a Nepali/Gorkhali, no solution to the nomenclature crisis of the community will be possible.

The second section is devoted to 'Search for Indian National Identity'. It consists of five papers. In a thought provoking presentation on 'Education, Institutions and Elites Bonding of Nepali Public in Early 20th Century', Rhoderick Chalmers charts out the evolution of Indian Nepali public as an increasingly assertive middle class, challenging the power hierarchy within Nepali society. This process led to inclusion of some and exclusion of other segments of society. Keeping this over-all

context in view, the chapter examines three crucial areas: the development of formal education, building of social and cultural institutions and composition of a nascent Nepali civil society. The author exhibits how the development of a modern public culture challenged social structure and models of authority, prompting a struggle for control over language norms and language system. The significant point the author makes at the end deserves serious consideration of the Nepali intelligentsia: 'the process of public negotiation of shared cultural attributes that emerged in this period (in Darjeeling) were both new and crucial to the definition of a modern sense of Nepaliness'. In the next chapter, Rajendra P. Dhakal explains the nuances of the Indian Nepali sub-nationalism in Darjeeling, shows how search for a Gorkha identity is characterized by a strong sense of insecurity, and it is not antithetical to Indian nationalism and national integration, and makes a strong plea for recognition as an equal and proud Indians. Similarly, Ranju R. Dhamala notes two different trends of identity formation in Darjeeling and Sikkim. Further, she finds that various shades of Nepali movements are addressed to identity assertion as a part of broader Indian identity.

Vimal Khawas begins by raising the question: 'Why do the Indians confuse the Nepalis with the Nepalese?' In his view, to address the issues of the two sets of Nepali speakers (Nepalis and Nepalese), certain factors need to be debated. First, the Indo-Nepalese Treaty of Friendship, 1950 need to be looked afresh. Secondly, one has to think how to separate the Indian Nepalis from the Nepalese migrants to Indian metropolitan centres. Shrawan Acharya explores the variety of causes of Nepali ethnic assertion, identifies positive and negative consequences of such developments and suggests a public policy intervention based on cultural planning to mitigate the negative consequences of the Nepali ethnic assertion. He identifies structural inequality, issue of the Constitutional reservation policy and increasing awareness, exposure to media and equalitarian ideas as important reasons for intra-Nepali ethnic assertions. He concludes his presentation with a plea for harnessing the positive public initiatives for treating Nepali sub-cultures as resources and for that Community Based Organizations (CBOs) should be encouraged.

The third section is on regional identities of the Indian Nepalis. The first article in this section by T.N. Upadhyaya notes that though the literary journey of the Nepalis in the region began much earlier, Dhan Bahadur Rai's *Ek Thanga Phool* (1928) is considered to be the earliest Nepali novel in Northeast India. Then he examines Lil Bahadur Chhetri's series of novels as a major source of regional Nepali history depicting their

psyche, style of life, economy, family life, stories of exploitation, and a variety of contributions to local economy through their hard labour on the jobs normally not undertaken by the regional indigenous communities. Similarly, K.B. Nepali's *Mero Ghar, Mero-Sansar* depicts gory images of 1987 anti-Nepali communal riots in Meghalaya. At last, he informs how Chandrashwar Dube's novels have described the trials and tribulations of Nepalis in the region. Ultimately, Upadhyaya laments that it has been more than a century since the Nepalis settled in the region, but even today the problems faced by them remain the same. The dominant theme in most of the literary works continues to be the problem of food and shelter. The question of our political identity remains unresolved to this day. In the next article D. Sapkota reports on Nepali settlements and Cattle Rearing in the Northeast region. It is an interesting chapter depicting lives of herdsmen, their economy, ethnography of settlements, rules and procedures for cattle grazing, and introduction of dairy business in the region.

K.L. Pradhan highlights the unique problems faced by the Gorkhas in Mizoram. He notes that the Gorkhas settled in the state prior to 1950 were recognized as bonafide residents of the state with all the rights but the problems emerged when the Nepalese began to come in search of jobs after 1950. The Mizos could not distinguish between the new comers and old settlers and feared being overwhelmed by the migrants. Hence they pressurized the government of Mizoram to withdraw in 1980 the special privileges accorded to the Gorkhas of the state. The old settlers are still fighting to get those privileges restored. Amena Passah enlightens the readers on how the Nepali society was established in Meghalaya and on some of their internal contradictions. She notes that the British intrusion and advent of the Nepalis in Meghalaya went hand in hand. The Nepali adage: 'dress according to the place you are in' is indicative of their extensive assimilation with the local tribal communities at all the levels. She also traces the history of their settlements, anti-Nepali riots of 1987, alienation of the Nepalis from the dominant tribal context and specific plight of the Nepali Christians.

With Nira Devi's chapter on history of Nepali settlements in Assam, the focus of this volume shifts from the hills to the plains. The author provides a brief history of Nepali settlement in Assam and settles down with a field study based data from a village from the Brahmaputra plains. She gives an interesting ethnography of Nepali settlement of Gangmouthan village, its social set-up, economy and interactive pattern between Nepalis and the Assamese villagers. Tejimala Gurung tells the story of Nepali

coolies in upper Assam coal fields from 1907. The practice was simply a reminder of old indentured labour conscription from distant Nepal through a fraudulent system of recruitment. Though the number of Nepalis involved as colliers was not large the details provided by the author are indicative of the extent of inhuman exploitation of the Nepalis that took place in Assam during the colonial days.

The fourth section is a significant one. It addresses the issues of 'Nepali sub-cultures: youth, women, food and medicine' and contains four presentations. Anuradha Sharma surveyed the India Born Confused Nepali (IBCN) youths in April 2006 from Bhubaneswar, Calcutta, Delhi, Goa and Mumbai on a number youth related issues. The findings were eye openers: the IBNC were not proud to be Nepali, had a laid back attitude to life, were reluctant to be part of the mainstream and suffered from an acute inability to dream. They were also critical of their elders, believed that state and the federal governments had not been able to protect their rights and many of them had misplaced loyalties to India and Nepal. They were equally divided on whether they were Nepalis or Gorkhas. With a view to addressing some of the above issues, the author suggests youth net-working. Sharda Chhetri undertook a study sponsored by Terre des hommes Foundation, Switzerland on the Nepali girls in red light areas in the metropolitan India. It was found that out of 200,000 Nepali girls in the red light areas, 25 per cent were from Sikkim, Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri. They are sold for anything between Rs. 70,000 and Rs. 100,000. She shows how the sex workers are in state of bondage, slavery and starvation. Their exodus to red light areas has increased since the advent of Maoist insurgency in Nepal. Among some of the reasons for their exodus were poverty, loss of traditional occupations, broken families, lure of films and easy life. The author's key finding of the study was that almost all Nepali girls had entered prostitution in a situation of slavery or debt bondage under the age of 18 years and at an average age of 14 to 16 years. A majority of them are trafficked by the Nepalese themselves and sold to the brothel owners in India.

Jyoti P. Tamang's chapter on food and identity touches an important aspect of the Nepamul life style. A typical food of an average Nepamul is *bhat-dal-tarkari-achar* (boiled rice, lentil soup, curry and pickles). Then he enumerates more than two dozen food items unique to Sikkim and Darjeeling. Moreover, there are as many as 80 types of common food and beverages found in Northeast region. They are a distinct cultural heritage of the country. D.R. Chhetri's chapter on 'Herbal Medicinal Culture of Nepalis of Darjeeling and Sikkim' finds that the traditional

herbal medicine relates to health practices, approaches, knowledge and beliefs incorporating naturally available plants or plant products applied singularly or in combination with minerals, animal products, spiritual therapies etc. in order to diagnose, treat and prevent illnesses or maintain well-being. Traditional systems of medicine attempt to embody a holistic approach, i.e., viewing an individual in his totality with the socio-ecological system. The socio-ecological system remarkably influences the mental state of an individual which in turn alters the secretions of neurohormones etc. These secretions have profound physiological effects. Therefore, it is worthwhile to devise novel methods to evaluate the intriguing aspects of traditional medicine. About 70-75 per cent of Indian population is dependent on herbal medicine for primary health care because of better cultural acceptability, better compatibility with the human body and lesser side effect. Availability and cost-effectiveness are other reasons for its popularity. He identifies some of its drawbacks and makes suggestions to enrich them through research and better managerial styles.

The fifth and the last section on 'India-Nepal Linkages' contains four chapters. First of the four chapters in this section is contributed by Madhav P. Pokhrel on origin and development of Nepali language. It is an intensely researched article by one of the experts in the field. He traces the sources of its origin and informs that while Nepal had termed it "Gorkha Bhasha", it was the literary world of Darjeeling, which gave the nomenclature "Nepali" to the common language. The author acknowledges the singular roles played by educational institutions in Calcutta, Benaras, Darjeeling, and Shillong in development and standardization of Nepali. B.C. Upreti makes an important contribution in the form of chapter on 'India-Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship: Nature, Problems and Questions'. The author is of the view that the uniqueness of treaty has worn out and notes that there are demands in Nepal and India to revise, or even to abrogate it altogether. Then, he raises a number of questions: What are expectations of India and Nepal from this treaty? Where has it failed? Is it irrelevant today? To what extent can the treaty ensure identities of the Indians in Nepal and the Nepalese in India? Before trying to find answers to the above, he notes that characteristics of the treaty also has defense and security, economic and social aspects between the two countries to be kept in perspective. The author enumerates various ways in which Nepal violated the terms of the treaty. At the end, he raises two questions: Does the treaty separate two types of speakers of Nepali language: Nepalese and Nepalis? Does

Nepal want to revise/replace or abrogate the treaty? He finds no consensus either in Nepal or in India on these issues.

D.B. Chhetry's chapter on 'Nepalis and Bangladeshis: A Comparative Study' notes how Bangladeshis, who are illegal migrants are encouraged to settle in India whereas the Nepalis who India is treaty-bound to accept as its own nationals are subjected to ill-treatment. Last contribution in this section is on an important issue but utterly lost sight of, that is, 'The Shared Destiny: Indians of Nepalese Origin (INO) and Nepalese of Indian Origin (NIO)' by A.C. Sinha. After a thorough comparison between the Nepalis in India and Madhesis in Nepal, the author concludes:

Nepal and India both continue to treat Madhesis and INOs in typically colonial style by denying the basic democratic rights and invariably treating them as non-existent citizens. The problem in India is that it is an open system, in which every ethnic group/ sub-nationality is to compete with others for political space and all types of resources. Though there are constitutional and political guarantees for equality among the communities/nationalities, this does not automatically ensure equality to be translated in reality. Thus, in practice, some are more equal than others in terms of their political role, economic affluence, cultural attainments, and over-all indicators of social development. The INOs represent a miniscule community tugged in an economically backward corner in India, who is suspected with Nepalese citizenship in the eyes of many Indians. Their problems too are not taken seriously as worthy of national deliberation, as they are considered transient settlers. Needless to add that the community itself has not been able to help itself by tactfully articulating its grievances in a democratic and peaceful way to persuade others to come round to the community's stand point. The INOs must know that in an open society such as India, no body is ranged against them; rather rest of the ethnic groups/nationalities are engaged in enhancing their own bargaining power. The best people to learn from are their Nepalese counterpart, the Madhesi under-dogs, who have forced the hill Bahun-Chhetri-Newar power wielders during the last six months to take note of the Madhesi demands and ensure corrective steps for their redressal.

'The Last Word So Far...' by T.B. Subba is in lieu of conclusion.

The process of churning that formally began in 2001 in Shillong culminated in the conference held in Gangtok and the result of our common endeavour is before the readers. It is for the readers to ponder over the issues laid bare here in this book, and help the intelligentsia to lead the society towards a desirable direction. The Nepali youths are angry, their intellectuals are confused, and their opinion makers have no clue. The present volume may show some direction to them all.

In the light of the above discussion, there is no doubt that the nationality of the Nepamul Bharatiya is Indian. There is also a consensus that they must be treated and seen as separate from the Nepalese and Lhotshampas. But how it can be achieved is not clear either to our contributors or to the policy makers. And we must evolve ways to separate the two sets of Nepali speakers—the Indian Nepalis and the Nepalese. Similarly, nomenclature of the community, which is crying for an answer, is an issue addressed by Subba in this volume but a consensus on the same is yet to evolve.

I am in agreement with my editorial colleagues, however, that the INO situation is not that bad and the very fact that we sat together to ponder over the issues faced by the community shows how vibrant is the actual ground reality. Perhaps what is not matching is the lack of concerted endeavours on the part of the intelligentsia, opinion leaders and youths to pull the community out of its uncertainty, apathy, and inactivity. Maybe, we meet again to take stock of the INO situation some years later somewhere.

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Shared Destiny: Indians of Nepalese Origin (INO) and Nepalese of Indian Origin (NIO)

A.C. SINHA

The cultural map of ancient India refers to *Jambu Dwipe Bharat Khande*, recited on all auspicious occasions among orthodox Hindus, which had concept of India from the (Indian) Ocean to the Himalaya, known as *Asetu Himalaya*. That classical image of Bharatkhand among others prominently described the Himalaya as the abode of gods, sages, rishis, Yakshas, Kinnars, Kirats and holy citadel of Lord Shiva, one among the Hindu trinity of Gods, and from where, the sacred rivers such as Ganges, Yamuna, Saryu, and Brahmputra originate. One of the best poetic descriptions of the Himalaya may be discerned from a Sanskrit classic of the great bard Kalidasa, who termed it 'Devtatma Himalayo Nama Nagadhiraj'. In that image of the Himalaya, there was no distinction between Kashmir, Himanchal, Uttaranchal or Nepal parts of the Himalaya. They were/are all Himalaya, which were considered holy land of retreat, penance, and shrines of the sacred beings. The Hindus from all over had/have an abiding desire to go on pilgrimage to the holy sacred centres among others Pasupatinath in Kathmandu. In the same spirit, denizens of the Himalayan region used to go on pilgrimage to *char dham* (four holy centres) on four directions, and seven *tirthas* or *puris* at different locations all over India. The great reformer, Swami Sankaracharya, undertook a pilgrimage to Pasupatinath with a view to establishing his school of Hinduism there. The sacred specialists from southern India officiate as priests in many of the holy shrines in the Himalaya inclusive of Pasupatinath at Kathmandu.

The Magadh Empire under Ashoka the great or Gupta rulers and many other dynastic rulers in eastern India in ancient period of the south Asian history spread their sway in present day Nepal. Ancient Mithila, the land of mythic kings, Janaka of Videha, invariably extended to the hills and major parts of the eastern terai of Nepal. And many of the rulers of the regional dynasties of Mithila, and mid and eastern Nepal had their sway in the hills as well as in the plains and the terai in particular. In this context, two small republics of Lichchavis and Shakyas, located in the northern Bihar, eastern Uttar Pradesh and Nepal terai in the pre-Maurayan period of the Indian history are of historical significance. Needless to mention that Sidharth, who came to be known as Gautam Buddha after his enlightenment at Bodh Gaya and who was the originator of Buddhism, was born at Kapilvastu in terai. Nepal has tried to appropriate Buddha as Nepalese without his Indian context. Since then, most of the rulers at Pataliputra, Kanauj, Delhi and elsewhere in north India, extended their sway up to Nepal. Even in the medieval period of Indian history, Delhi rulers desired to rule over the Himalaya region. In this context, even in the bad days of Mughal period, Baisi and Chaudisi principalities in western and middle Nepal were under some sort of sovereignty of the great Mughal Empire. The claim of the great Gorkha king, Prithvi Narayan Shah, that the Gorkha kingdom was the 'real land of the Hindus' (*asal Hindustan*) should be seen in a cultural sense, as bulk of India had by then come under the alien—read Muslim or the British rule. By then, the British had begun to consolidate their stronghold on rest of India and naturally, Nepal got busy in carving itself an autonomous image of the Hindu kingdom, distinct from the British India.

History of INO and NIO

Hrishikesh Shaha, a noted scholar of Nepal, writes that in ancient times, terai contained several well-known centres of Vedic and Buddhist learning—Janakpur, Biratnagar, and Niglihava. The Buddhist republics of Shakyas and Kolis such as Kapilvastu and Ramgam were situated in the central terai. In the east lay the famed seats of Vedic learning such as Videha and Vestadipak. Kautilya's *Arthashastra* took note of the black woolen blankets from Nepal, which were used as excellent raincoats. The earliest rulers and dynasties such as Gopalas (cow-herds) and Mahisapalas (buffalo-herds) may suggest pastoral and nomadic stage of their society prior to the wider use and prevalence of agriculture.¹ One learns from D.R. Regmi that, 'From 50 AD to 350 AD, i.e., for a period

of 300 years, Nepal seems to have lost its independent status on the regular domination from Patliputra.² There is a consensus among the scholars that Lichchhvi rule in Nepal commenced in the first or second century AD and continued till the end of eighth century. Needless to mention here that major concentration of the Lichchhvis was at Vaisali in north Bihar.³ In 1200, a new king, Ari Malla, was the first to adopt the suffix 'Malla', a honourific title which was probably initially used by the Pallava dynasty of southern India. The 600 years prior to Prithvi Narayan Shah's conquest of the valley (of Kathmandu) in 1768-69 are consequently referred to as the "Malla Period".⁴

After the fragmentation of the Khasa empire, located in present day Uttaranchal in India, south-eastern Tibet and bulk of western Nepal, in fifteenth century, a series of petty principalities emerged in Karnali basin (*Baisi*—twenty-two) and Gandaki basin (*Chaubisi*—twenty-four). Among them, 'while some new rulers were genuine refugees from the plains, others were really of Khasa or Magar origin, though claims and counter claims make it impossible to be sure of true origin of any particular family. The Sen rulers of Palpa and Makawanpur are referred to as Magars in documents from the Kathmandu valley and Sikkim. The Shahs of Gorkha were also some times described as Magars and the names of Kancha and Micha, which occur in the genealogy linking the dynasty to the brother of a Chittar ruler (of Rajasthan in India) perhaps, support this. The ruler of Baldeng (near present-day Butwal), overthrown by Palpa and other Chaubisi states around 1700, was also supposedly a Magar.'⁵

Moreover, it is not true that all Rajputs were simply fleeing away from the Muslim wrath in the medieval period. This period also saw a general consolidation and agrarian expansion in Southasia as a whole, together with monetization of the economy. Against this background, 'individual families failing to find a niche in the plains areas immediately south of Nepal may have decided to carve out lordships for themselves in the foothills. The founder of the Palpa Sen dynasty may be an example of this. According to one version of the story, he moved from Allahabad into terai and then into the hills rather than directly from Rajasthan.'⁶

To take the above argument further, Rishkesh Shaha⁷ records that as early as sixteenth century, Sen Rajas of Makwanpur in eastern terai had managed to set up dynasties in the kingdom of Chaudandi and Vijaypur, which covered the entire eastern terai region of Nepal. If the rulers in the hills were in a position to snatch away the terai land by force, they would always do so. If it was not possible, they would persuade the rulers in the plains to give the terai on payment of rent. In the last decade of the

eighteenth century, the Raja of Palpa obtained the zamindari of Kapilvastu, Rupandehi and parts of Nawal Parasi districts from the Nawab Wazir of Awadh. However, coming to the present status of the Nepal terai, as a result of the Treaty of Segowli, on December 2, 1815, Nepal was to surrender the entire terai from east to west to the British. However, Nepal recovered eastern and central terai in 1817 and the western terai was returned to it as a reward of its services rendered to the British during the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857. Incidentally, the sepoy mutiny also resulted in an extensive immigration of plains people from India to the terai with a view to running away from the British harassments.

The Treaty of Peace (Segowli), 1815 envisaged under Article 3 that all terai lands and the hills eastward of the River Mechi including the forts and lands of Nagree and the pass of Nagarcote were to be ceded to the East India Company. Similarly, Article 5 presumed that the rulers of Nepal would renounce all their claims on the territories west of river Kali in the west. The treaty binds Nepal as per Article 6, which says 'never to molest or disturb the Rajah of Sikkim in the possession of the territories' and agrees for the arbitration of the British in case of differences, if any. The rulers of Nepal were given 40 days to vacate the territories east of River Mechi and as soon as it was accomplished, the British got their acts together to carve out a buffer state of Sikkim between Nepal and Bhutan. Sikkim Durbar and the East India Company signed a ten article treaty at Titaliya on February 10, 1817, by which the British agreed to cede all the Sikkim land secured from Nepal to the former. Consequently, the British issued a *sanad* on April 7, 1817 granting Sikkim rule of all the above territories, but Sikkim was reduced to a feudatory of the British in effect. Very soon, the British tricked the ruler to part with Darjeeling hills on plea of turning it into a sanitarium for the sick British residents. Growth of Darjeeling town turned out to be a contest between oriental and occidental approach to human affairs. While the British were busy turning it into a thriving hill station in a systematic manner, the adjoining feudatories were worried about controlling their run away slaves, serfs, peasants, and tenants, who were attracted to remunerative works in Darjeeling. All these resulted in the Treaty of Tumlong, 1861 between the Company and the Sikkim ruler and in the Treaty of Sinchula, 1865 between Bhutan and the Company, by which the territories of the district of Darjeeling were secured. It may be kept in mind that Darjeeling and the Duars eastward of it were very thinly populated at the time. And incidentally, this was also the time British were busy laying out tea plantations and railway tracts for an effective commercial exploitation.

Apart from inexpensive, willing and industrious Nepali labour for clearing the dense, undulating, mountainous forests of Northeast India for tea plantation and laying out roads and rails, the British also invented a myth of the Gorkha martial race. It may be pertinent that in the aftermath of the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857, the British were determined to prove that the Bengalis and high caste Hindus from the Gangetic plains were effeminate and thus, unsuitable for the armed forces. This explains the extensive immigration of coolie as indentured labour from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, the theatre of the revolt, to far away British and other European colonies across the oceans for plantation work. Meanwhile, Gorkhas, Sikhs, Marathas and others, who did not take part in the Sepoy Mutiny, were elevated to the status of 'martial race' by creating many real and putative myths and thus, they were recruited to armed forces. Coming to theme of our present concern, the Gorkhas or the Nepalis, 'the Gurkhas seemed to have an additional quality associated with those who led them: the special combination of traits (courtesy, humour, sportsmanship) which defines persons' breeding. They were, in short, not simply warriors, but gentlemen as well; hence their depiction akin to public school boys'⁸. Despite being Easterners, they are as if honorary Europeans. And like all martial peoples, the Gorkhas were invariably brave, though in an unthinking, instinctual, some what simple, unimaginative character, encapsulated in a permanent state of juvenile.

As long as the British were in India, they treated Nepal as a farm for breeding coolies and soldiers. There was so much stress on Gorkha recruitment from the Nepal hills that even the progeny of the same Gorkha settlers in and around the army cantonments (termed as the lines boys) were considered unfit for the recruitment in the armed forces. In the same way, the British were certain that the Gorkhas would not like to serve under the Indian officers in the event of India gaining independence in 1947. It was a myth, which was punctured when as per Tripartite Agreement between Great Britain, India and Nepal, 6 Gorkha regiments out of 10 opted to serve India, and naturally under the Indian officers. A significant step was undertaken by Nepal and India, when the Treaty of Peace and Friendship was signed by the representatives of the two governments on July 31, 1950 at Kathmandu. Article 6 of the treaty 'undertakes to give to the nationals of the other in its territory' same treatment, which it gives to its citizens. Similarly, Article 7 stipulates that: 'the governments of India and Nepal agree to grant, on reciprocal basis, to the nationals of one country in the territory of other, the same privileges in matters of residence, ownership of property, participation

in trade and commerce, movement and other privileges of a similar nature.’ We shall see how the INOs see Article 7 as detrimental to their interests as Indian nationals and how a section of the Nepal Nepalis feel that the treaty has out-lived its relevance with changing times.

Locating the INO and NIO

Before we begin to analyze who are the INOs and NIOs, it is pertinent to clarify a significant point. It is normally claimed in Nepal that the NIO or Madheshis are the land-hungry emigrants from the Indian plains, who went to Nepal terai after the Sepoy Mutiny with a view to clearing the forest and claiming the fertile agricultural fields. Similarly, it is maintained in India that the INOs were invited by the British to develop Darjeeling and to mine copper and mint coins in Sikkim some 150 years back. These claims are partly true. But the fact is that ancestors of the Madheshis in terai and Kirati Nepalis in Sikkim were already there even before 1814-15 Anglo-Nepalese war. The point to be noted is that not all Madheshis and likewise not all Nepalis in Sikkim (which earlier included Darjeeling district of present day West Bengal) were migrants and, in fact, some of them have a better claim to be the “sons of soil” than many others in their respective places. The Royal Government of Nepal since 1960 has consistently maintained that terai is inhabited by a variety of castes, who speak Maithili, Bhojpuri and Awadhi, and are, in fact, Indians residing in Nepal by taking advantage of open border. They are oriented towards India in every walk of life such as social, economic, religious and political and in fact they create a strain on limited Nepalese resources. To Nepal, except their self-interest nothing binds them together with the rest of the Nepalese. The Nepalese state mentions of terai as the southern-most territory of Nepal, 200 metres above the sea level, 10 to 30 miles wide and about 500 miles in length from west to east. Its significance was noted by Rishikesh Shaha thus: ‘The terai has an area of 9,437 square miles or 14.4 percent of total area, and a population of 34.56 percent of the total...It contributes 58.9 percent of GDP and 75.6 percent of government’s revenue...It represents 62 percent of Nepal’s cultivated area and 71.8 percent of Nepal’s private industries are located in the terai.’⁹ Further, the terai has 18 out of 75 districts from east to west: Jhapa, Morang, Sunsari, Saptari, Siraha, Dhankuta, Mahottari, Sarlahi, Rautahat, Bara, Parsa, Newar-Parasi, Rupadehi, Kapilvastu, Banke, Bardiya, Kailali, and Kanchanpur. Though Nepal does not recognize it, Hindi is the lingua franca of the entire terai.

Between 1860s and 1951, the Nepal government encouraged economic development in the terai and made efforts to settle hill people there. But the response from the hill people was poor due to hot, humid and unfamiliar malarial climate. The Rana regime of Nepal had no choice, but to depend on the migrants from across the border to invest in clearing the dense terai forests and turning them into thriving agrarian economy. There was another development in Nepal since 1950s. And that was the existence of the political parties, which functioned as "melting pots", not only for regionally and culturally diverse groups but also for the urban modernizing elite, the traditional rural elite and for the large number of non-elite groups as well. But 'people of nationally dominant hill culture (read Bahun-Chhetri-Newar) and people of regionally important plains culture have lived separate existences until the last several decades, often with suspicion of each other. Citizenship legislation framed by representatives of the nationally dominant hill culture during the 1960s reflects this suspicion, for it makes the acquisition of citizenship more difficult for the people of the plains origin living in the Terai.'¹⁰ For example, the 1962 Constitution framed under King Mahendra, stipulated, in Article 8, section 2, that 'While making laws in pursuance of clause(i) it shall be, *inter alia*, stipulated that a foreigner may qualify for acquisition of citizenship if,

- (a) he can speak and write the national language of Nepal (i.e. Nepali);
- (b) he has resided in Nepal for not less than a period of two years in case of a person of Nepalese origin, and for not less than a period of twelve years in case of a person other than of Nepalese origin.'¹¹

In this way, 'elimination of the party system in 1960 has(d) returned Nepal to political system in which the traditional elite can assert its influence more exclusively. Although education has become an increasingly important factor in determining political influence, in the absence of direct elections and of political parties to compete in those elections, landownership and high caste status, factors monopolized by the traditional elite, remain more decisive in the political process.'¹²

In this context, the *Jana Andolan 1* (People's Movement 1), 1990 re-oriented the Nepalese polity from absolute authority of the king to a dual sovereignty of the constitutional monarchy and parliamentary democracy. And it made the people the ultimate source of the power. The

Jan Andolan II (i.e., the unprecedented mass uprising of 2006) has led to restructuring of the Nepalese state, 'there is no space for accommodating the monarchy, at least an active and exclusive king. There is a clear indication of the erosion of the legitimacy of the Nepali monarchy. The recent declaration of Nepal as a secular state is a conscious attempt to hammer at the claim of the divine right by the monarchy of Nepal.'¹³ No doubt, this has led to a wild explosion of expectations at all levels. However, significant among them are two: assertion of ethnic identities (*janjati* movement) at various levels and an ethno-regional identity of Madheshis in the terai. However, there is a marked shift in recent Madheshi movement, as terai dwellers cannot be equated with the Madheshis. 'The term "madhesi" literally means a dweller in '*madhes*' (Madhyades) or the plains. In theory any one living in terai could be considered a Madhesi, but it has assumed an ethnic meaning (just like Parbatiya or Pahari, meaning "hill-dwellers"). It refers to plains-dwellers of Indian, Hindu, origin. Usages differ, but it seems clear that the Tharus and other groups do not wish to be included in the category. The Parbatiyas, who are settled in the plains are definitely not included, and Muslims are not members either.'¹⁴

Right from 1769, variously termed as the Gorkha conquest of Kathmandu Valley by Prithvi Narayan Shah or unification of petty principalities into Nepal by him, the Nepalese rulers projected themselves as the true Hindu rulers by divine right and guardians of Hinduism vis-à-vis India, which was allegedly defiled by alien Muslim or British rulers. Moreover, it was touted as the only Hindu kingdom in the world against the enslaved or secular India, to prove its distinct identity. The Janajati elements in the east and north and Madhesi ethnic groups in the southern terai were played down as if they were aberrations to the dominant Bahun-Chhetri-Newar hill culture as the national icon. Furthermore, the Nepalese ruling class either made strenuous efforts to balance early historical influence of India on Nepal by referring to some shadowy contacts with the north, i.e., Tibet or China or empathizing Prithvi Narayan Shah as unifier of the Nepalese nation, as if it had always been a historical reality. In this context, 'the revival of Hinduisation by King Mahendra in the 1960s is another example of a ruler who does have a secular base invoking traditional legitimacy. By staging a coup in December, 1960, Mahendra ended the multi-party system and instead introduced a party-less panchayat under his leadership. The Panchayat Constitution of 1962, unlike the constitutions of 1951 and 1959, made Nepal a Hindu state.'¹⁵

The Nepalese hill elite allegedly disdain the Madhesis as merchants or landless labourers. The tragedy is that even Bihar and Uttar Pradesh treat them as uncouth (*bhade*) and avoid even marital relationships with them. C.K. Lal, a noted journalist of Kathmandu, provides example of a high caste Madhesi Bhumihar family, which had best of both the regimes, Indian and Nepalese. But even this family was subjected to social disdain from their Indian counterparts. It so happened that Bhadrakali Mishra and Ram Narayan Mishra held office of the Minister in the Royal Government of Nepal in 1950s and 1960s. Their other brother, Shyam Nandan Mishra, became the Minister of External Affairs in the short-lived government of India headed by Chaudury Charan Singh in 1979. It is said that their grandfather once went looking for a groom for his daughter among some of the reputed families of his caste in Bihar. He not only found the going tough, but was also told that while Mishras of Pipra may be rich they were subjects of the Ranas, whereas the Bhumihars of Bihar were independent zamindars under the British.¹⁶ This example discounts the significance of what the Madhesis call "*beti-roti ka rista*" (bread and bride relationship) from across the border.

With reference to the INOs some clarifications are needed. First, it must be accepted that Kirati elements who now speak Nepali and are identified as Nepalis were already in Sikkim, which then included the present district of Darjeeling under West Bengal, before an extensive immigration of the Nepalese to India occurred after the treaties of Segowli and Titaliya. Second, prior to the British colonization of India, Nepalese traders, pilgrims, roving holy men and sundry marital partners moved from Nepal to India and vis-a-vis. Third, there were seasonal migrants in search of manual work during agriculturally lean months of year, who returned home after a short stay in India. Fourth, the Gorkha soldiers were encouraged to return to Nepal after their superannuation. Fifth, hill communities from Nepalese ethnic commonwealth felt more at home in Northeast India and invariably they preferred to stay back, if opportunity arose. Sixth, it appears that they moved in a systematic way: first, it was Darjeeling, then Sikkim, followed by foothills in western Bhutan, and finally the British Assam hills. Seventh, herdsmen and dairymen moved in search of grazing grounds on river banks, degraded forests, and dry farmsteads right from 1850 onwards and they were encouraged by forest department which charged grazing fees.

The earliest contact of the Nepalese with Northeast India was in 1817, when 1,000 Hindustanis and "Gurkhas" took part in Sylhet expedition as a part of the Cuttack Legion (later known as the Assam

Light Infantry). I have noted elsewhere, 'The story of Nepali involvement in the consolidation of the region under the British Empire is ably presented by Col. Shakespeare's *History of the Assam Rifles* (1977). Whether it was Sylhet or the Shillong plateau, Naga Hills or Lushai Hills, Chittagong Hills Tract or Sadiya Frontier Tract, Bhutan War or Manipur rebellion, the Gurkhas constituted half of the Assam Rifles and were always there in operation. Their important role in the Assam Rifles was recognized in 1865, when the Nepali khukuri replaced the short sword, which used to impede their progress through the dense Assamese jungles. It may be appropriate to inform the readers that in course of time, the crossed khukuri was accepted as the emblem of the Assam Rifles, the custodians of the security of the region.'¹⁷

Apart from the Assam Rifles, the Gorkha Training Centre and various battalions of the armed forces were stationed in and around the district towns and the strategic locations in the hills of Northeast India. A number of them got settled around these places after their release from their service. The Assam Rifles alone has rehabilitated its Gorkha ex-soldiers in at least 40 sites in the region. In fact, some of these sites such as Sadiya in Assam, Matripokhri in Manipur, Aizawl in Mizoram and Mokokchung in Nagaland are as old as hundred years. Among such sites Assam alone has 13, Manipur 8, Mizoram and Nagaland 7 each, Arunachal Pradesh 3 and Meghalaya and Tripura have one each resettlement colonies of the ex-soldiers. And it goes without saying that these colonies predominantly belong to the INO. Most of the settlers have well adapted to the local social and cultural environment and they have turned out to be inseparable part of the local economy. Apart from the ex-soldiers, there are considerable number of herdsmen and dairy men, lumbermen, and sundry occupational castes such as Kami, Sarki, Damai, and the omnipresent Brahmin priests. Though there is no authentic statistics available on the INOs in the region, their number is estimated to be any thing from three and a half million to six million in Northeast India inclusive of West Bengal.

There is a predominance of what is known as Kirati ethnic groups in Sikkim, Darjeeling, Bhutan Duars and North-eastern region of India. Eastern Nepal has been traditional home of the Kirati communities, which naturally extended to erstwhile Bhutia principality of Sikkim. So the Kiratis like Limbus and Magars claim to be indigenous settlers of Sikkim. The Brahmins among the INOs came predominantly as herdsmen and dairy hands, which invariably turned to farming as and when the opportunity came their way. Ex-soldiers, who decided to settle in Northeast

India, were a mixed group of Chhetris, Magars, Gurungs, Rais, Limbus, and Tamangs. Hindu occupational castes like Upadhyayas, Kamis, Sarkis, and Damais naturally followed the Hindu INO settlements in this region.

Invisible, Yet Exploited: Characteristics INOs-NIOs Share

I. Both INOs and NIOs receive little academic attention in their own countries. The managers of the Nepalese hill culture make all efforts to distance themselves from its southern dominant neighbour, India, and consequently, presence of Madhesis, who proudly trace their cultural roots to the south.¹⁸ One of the best examples of deliberate playing down of the Madhesis may be cited from the celebrated work of Dor Bahadur Bista, *People of Nepal*.¹⁹ In the book running into 252 pages, the author allots only 12 pages to 'Brahman, Rajput and Occupational Castes of the terai'. He writes, '...the terai people speak languages akin to those spoken to the south and practice Indian social and religious customs. But in terai the diversity is great, encompassing several very different languages... (But) the social and economic organization of the terai people is similar to that of Brahmans, Chhetris and other occupational castes of the hill region of Nepal, but by virtue of their Indian influence their way of life is much more like that of North India than that of the Nepal hills. The vast majority of them are Hindus, but there are many Muslims. In contrast to liberal Hindu hill people, these people of terai and border areas are orthodox in their beliefs following Hinduism and caste rules as closely as possible to the classical Hindu pattern... For marriage and other socio-economic relations, the border is ignored. Social and kinship ties are much more important to them than the political boundaries.'²⁰

II. Both INOs and NIOs have a share of full-fledged citizens and people who are yet to acquire citizenship of the country they have settled in. In this context, it may be noted that as many as 35,000 stateless INOs were given citizenship 15 years after Sikkim's merger with India.²¹ So far Madhesis are concerned Nepal had discriminated against them as a policy, because incorporation of the Madhesis with a relatively sophisticated cultural background in the hill culture as a distinctive mark of Nepal was almost impossible. So the Government of Nepal made it almost impossible for an extensive number of Madhesis to possess citizenship documents and in the absence of such documents, they were not only forbidden from political participation, but also deprived economically and administratively. For example, in the absence of citizenship documents, no Madhesis could sell or buy a property, secure license for starting a

business, get admitted to the educational institutions and so on. In this context, the report of the High-Level Citizenship Commission, BS 2051 (1995), found more than three million Madhesis without citizenship certificates.²² However, to be fair to the present political dispensation in Nepal, having realized the enormity and seriousness of the problem, the present interim government sent teams of functionaries to distribute citizenship certificates to the Madhesis.

III. Both have inadequate voice/representation in the affairs of the state administration. So far as INOs are concerned, they rule the state of Sikkim as per the laws of land. It is they who decide all the significant issues in the district of Darjeeling in West Bengal. They have been represented in state legislative assemblies of Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur and West Bengal as per their population. So far the Indian national legislature is concerned, there are hardly about half a dozen representatives from the community out of a total number of about 750 in both the houses of the parliament. It is not that the community representation is inadequate, but the representatives do not have sophistication and stature to effectively participate in the affairs of the Indian Union. Thus, the community has no effective political voice; they hardly matter in terms of economic clout and very few of them have excelled in print, audio-visual, or other forms of mass media. Thus, when the community is in problem, they do not have spokesmen and their issues are simply ignored by the power to be.

So far Nepal is concerned officially about 35 percent people are of Madhesi origin, apart from an extensive number of residents, who do not possess citizenship certificates. A current estimate suggests that as much as 48 percent Nepalese are of Madhesi origin. But there are a number of ways through which Nepal denied them a genuine representation in its parliament. For example, demographically, terai constituency is much larger than that of the constituencies in the hills. Second, division of the constituencies has been done from north to south ostensibly with a view to including hill people and excluding dominance of the terai people, and not from east to west, which is natural and which favours the Madhesis. The 1990 democratic constitution allotted 83 out of 205 seats in the Pratinidhi Sabha (Lower Chamber of the Nepalese Parliament). Consequently, various political parties put up candidates from the hills from the terai constituencies, who could be elected as per party principles. Consequently, Madhesi representation was always much below their numerical strength. As for illustration, only 40 Madhesis irrespective of the political parties were elected to the last parliamentary election held in 1999.

IV. Both suffer from crisis of identity and carry a negative baggage from the past. So far as INOs are concerned their main grouse is that they are mistaken with the visiting Nepalese. Otherwise, there is no overt effort to suppress them, their voice, their language and their culture. Since 1992, Nepali is recognized as an Indian language and listed among the Indian languages under the VIII Schedule of the Indian Constitution. And for a long period of time, Sahitya Academy, the official body of the Government of India, did recognize the Nepali literature and Nepali authors have duly been awarded as per their merit. Nepali language is taught in a number of universities at different levels and, in fact, there is a huge corpus of literature produced in India. Moreover, there is complete freedom to the various communities to develop their own languages and scripts, as is evident in Sikkim, where various Kirati communities are engaged in enriching their languages.²³

Coming to Nepalese situation, the first population census, conducted in 1952-54, recorded 58,181 NIOs. Since then, the practice was stopped and a policy to enumerate the speakers of the dialects at the local level with a view to displaying the linguistic differences and to sow the discord among Maithils, Bhojpuris, and Awadhies was implemented. Though Hindi language is taught at Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu, its non-recognition by the state discourages students to study it. Further, against the over-whelming demand of the Madhesis, Nepali is the only medium of competitive examinations for various positions in the government. Moreover, Hindi was not even permitted to be spoken on the floor of the parliament till 1990. Same was the case with their dress—*dhoti-kurta*, the natural attire of the Madhesis—which was again not recognized as proper dress for a Nepalese for a formal occasion. Similarly in the absence of official non-sanction of government advertisement, the Hindi periodicals die a natural death.

V. Both suffer from discrimination at various levels and are thus engaged in struggle for securing justice for their members. The oldest INO forum, All India Gorkha League (AIGL), was established at Dehradun in 1923 and it demanded a Nepali speaking state within India. In course of time, the AIGL concentrated mainly in Duars and Darjeeling district. So much so that during the emotionally surcharged phase of Indian history, the region inclusive of Duars, Sikkim and Darjeeling was demanded to be integrated to Nepal in the event of Assam going to Pakistan. Even then the AIGL remained a formidable political party in Darjeeling and the Duars, but very soon it turned out to be a rudderless party without a clear political agenda for its followers. In such a vacuum,

the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) led by a former soldier and small time author, Subhas Ghishing emerged with its aggressive demands for a Gorkha homeland in Darjeeling in 1980s. The GNLF populist movement turned violent and intimidating, cutting Darjeeling hills and Sikkim from the rest of India in terms of communication for days together. In an enigmatic and dramatic way, Ghishing termed the INOs as Gorkhas, their language as Gorkhali, and their imagined state, Gorkhaland. This led to further controversy and confusion among the INOs. At long last, Ghishing's agitation resulted in establishment of the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC) in West Bengal and since then he remained the chairman of that body until March 2008.

The Gorkhaland movement settled for a DGHC for the Darjeeling hills. This was the time trouble started for the Lhotshampas in Bhutan. Many of the former GNLF members assisted the Lhotshampas in a variety of ways. However, Ghishing's autocratic and personalized style of functioning did not endear him to a universal respect and love from the community for him. The ethnic movement with a view to championing the cause of the INOs and spear-headed by him was split into Gorkha and Nepali, from which it is yet to recover. Presently, there are parallel Gorkha and Nepali associations at political, social, cultural, literary, and other forums purportedly espousing the cause of the INOs. Occasionally, one learns the existence of an All India Gorkha Parishad, which holds its sessions at various places in the country and tries to distance itself from Subhas Ghishing. Right now, it appears that the community suffers from absence of creditable leadership to take up the issues of the community's interest.

VI. Both have contributed immensely to the economic prosperity of the states of their domicile, which remains unrewarded. Frederick Gaige, writing in 1975, gives figures for revenue generated in terai for the year 1965-66 for timber, land revenue, customs and excise to be 76 percent of the total income. 'To sum up, although the terai accounts for only 17 percent of Nepal's land area and 31 percent of its population, it contributes approximately 59 percent of Nepal's GDP and 76 percent of the revenue.'²⁴ He found as much as 72 percent of Nepal's smaller industries located in the terai (p. 34). Moreover, 'except for several stainless steel and synthetic-fabric factories, one cotton mill (not operating at the time) and one steel-rolling mill, nearly all of Nepal's industry, whether large-scale or small-scale, processes timber and agricultural produce are grown in the terai.'²⁵ India is demographically a big country, in which the INO population is really a miniscule. Moreover, their location in Sikkim, Darjeeling, Duars

and Northeastern states is mired in regional ethnic conflicts. Incidentally, these are industrially, commercially, and politically marginal areas in the Indian Union and have an image of predominantly “tribal states” with a number of constitutional guarantees on their land, culture, and other resources. However, contribution of the easily and cheaply available INO labour for infra-structure development of the region is universally acknowledged. Similarly, services rendered by the Gorkha soldiers to armed forces are a well-established reality and Indian nation is indebted to its soldiers for their services at large.

The theatre of the anti-Rana agitation, launched in 1951 by the Nepali Congress, was central and eastern terai, the “land of the Madhesis”. It was the Madhesis, who fought with the autocratic Rana regime as the soldiers of the Nepali Congress along other Nepalese and the Indian political class. The Ranacracy was removed, but before democracy could be established, King Mahendra introduced a retrograde panchayati system, which made efforts to negate any democratic achievements made for the terai region during the chaotic democratic phase of 1952-1960. King Mahendra issued a directive in January 1958, making it mandatory in all schools to teach through the medium of Nepali. Vedanad Jha, a Madhesi Nepalese, had organized Nepali terai Congress as early as 1951 with following demands: (i) establishment of an autonomous terai state, (ii) recognition of Hindi as a state language, and (iii) adequate employment of terai people in the Nepal civil service. He pleaded that Hindi was the language of all the residents of terai. The problem was that in the universally illiterate state of Nepal, every body spoke in mother tongue at home and when they had to formally communicate with the authorities, it was in Hindi. But the state did not recognize this reality and declared terai people as speakers of a set of mother tongues—Mathili, Bhojपुरi, Awadhi, Tharu, and so on. Vedanad Jha did not do well electorally but he was incorporated in the ruling system as a minister and then as an ambassador.

Another political outfit emerged in terai in 1980s called Nepal Sadbhawna Party (NSP) led by Gajendra Narayan Singh, who was elected to the Nepalese parliament more than once and was elevated to the office of a minister. After his demise, the NSP got divided into two. But the dominant faction headed by Anandi Devi, Singh’s widow, continued to be represented in the parliament and even in the national cabinet. This party is one of the constituents of the ruling seven parties’ alliance along with the Maobadis in Nepal. Once the Maobadis joined the government in Nepal and the process of instituting a Constituent Assembly was on,

patience of the Madhesis gave way, as they saw it as continuation of the same old game of politically ignoring the terai. So a number of violent forums such as Madhesis Janadhikar Forum, Janatantrik Terai Mukti Morcha (Jwala Singh), Janatantrik Terai Morcha (Jai Prakash Goit) sprang up and took the violent route followed by the Maoists to make their point heard by the established democratic political parties. They were finally heard. The present care-taker regime is worried about the anti-state violence in terai and the international community is looking at the events as they unfold there. The Madhesis have been able to send a clear signal that whosoever may control the destiny of Nepal, Madhesis will take it no more lying down and they will not accept the old appellation of “*Timiharu Madhesi*” (You are Madhesis) any more.

There are charges that the palace might have instigated the violence in the terai. There is another school of “wise men” who feel that Madhesi agitation is inspired by the Hindutva brigade from India. Yet another speculation is rife that the force behind the Madhesi movement is that of the intelligence agencies controlled by the Government of India. All these wise men/women still refuse to give any credit to the Madhesis that can take their own decisions affecting their future. Naturally, the present regime of seven parties plus one (Maoists) headed by Girija Prasad Koirala is worried the most. The Maoists, who had incorporated the Madhesis in their grand redesigning of the Nepalese system on ethnic and regional criteria, are terribly upset and intelligentsia of Nepal are worried for the future of democracy in Nepal. But need of the hour is to politically engage and incorporate the various segments of Nepalese society into a mosaic. Political commentator C.K. Lal cautions: ‘The government must listen to all groups. If they listen, they will realize that no major political party has a Madhesi chairperson or secretary; that out of 500 or so political appointments since the Jana Andolan (II), less than one percent have been Madhesis. Right now, the situation is at the level of grievances. If not heeded, it will translate into demands, which will soon become conditional and then turn non-negotiable. The state must remember that no one is willing to die for a bright future, but there is no dearth of people willing to die for (ending) a bleak past.’²⁶

VII. Both express themselves in their lingua franca, i.e., Nepali and Hindi. Both the communities write in the same Deonagori script, and both speak mutually intelligible languages and, thus, there is a need for making a common cause to sensitize the states on common heritage and convince the power to be about how negligence has led to a fruitless suspicion and sterile conflict of interests. There is another aspect, which

needs to be looked into mainly by media and intelligentsia. And this is an atmosphere of suspicion on the simple folk struggling to make a living by their sheer helpless toil and indirectly contributing to building nation strong. Both the Nepamul Bharatiya and the Madhesis have been charged by their compatriots that they represent the advance guards of their cultural founts from across the borders. INOs are suspect in India and the Madhesis are charged to be Indians in Nepal and this has gone on for the last six decades at least. This must stop, because this type of sinister charge has no foundation. Both the regimes, Nepalese and Indian, should ponder over the fact that they are opening a new front, where except the goodwill no rancour exists. Both the regimes, which claim to be open democratic systems, should incorporate the ethnic, linguistic, economic and political demands of their citizens. In this context, demand for a Gorkha homeland deserves all serious consideration. Similarly, had there been concern for treating the Madhesis fairly as proud partners in the affairs of Nepal by the successive governments since 1951, violent upsurge in Terai would not have emerged and so many lives would not have been lost. Still there is time to take positive steps and not treat the democratic upsurge as a criminal act of some anti-national hotheads.

Looking Ahead: Prospect for the Future

It was simply pettiness and narrow pride on the part of the state of Nepal in its treatment of Hindi, the natural language of the millions of terai people. Hindi and Nepali would both enrich one another as media of instruction in the Nepalese schools. By failing to do so, the Nepalese state created a hostile, discontented and worried citizen out of law-abiding and hard working simple Madhesis. It is a universally known fact that Hindi is an apex language out of Awadhi, Bhojpuri, Magadhi, Maithili, Bundelkhandi, Brajbhasha, Rajasthani, Haryanvi, and so on. It is also a known truth that some of these languages have created very rich literature in spite of being linked with Hindi. Hindi has a huge readership, a vast publishing industry, and an honoured tradition of literary movement. Similarly, Hindi cinema has come to stay at international level as an effective means of knowledge, information and entertainment. Moreover, it is recognized by the United Nations as an international language for use in many countries beyond Indian shore. The unique thing about Hindi is its script, Devanagri, which it has proudly inherited from its mother language, Sanskrit, and which it shares with about a dozen of sister languages: Nepali, Marathi, Konkani, Gujarati, Rajasthani, Punjabi,

Dogri, Maithili, Haryanvi and so on. So the Nepalese policy pursued by King Mahendra of “*ek raja, ek desh, ek vesh*” (one king, one country and one dress) was extended to the “principle of one language” (*ek bhasha*) also. Nepal created a myth that no body speaks Hindi in Nepal in the same way now Bhutan is trying to convince itself that no body speaks Nepali in Bhutan and Lhotshampas speak only their mother tongues: Rai, Limbu, Gurung, Magar, Tamang, and so on. One wonders what will be officially approved ‘mother tongue’ of the Lhotshampa Brahmins, Chhetris, Kamis, Sarkis, Damais, etc. But one Bhutanese²⁷ scholar with a fertile mind has coined an unheard term, “Lhotsham-mi-kha” as the language of the left-over Lhotshampas in southern Bhutanese foothills.

While Nepal tried to divide Madhesis among Maithilis, Awadhis and Bhojpuris, it is the INOs themselves, who are controverting on Gorkha and Nepali as their appropriate nomenclature. It is the fact that there is considerable language loss among the migrants, especially when they reside among ethnically mixed settlements. The Newars, Limbus, Magars, Gurungs, Rais, Tamangs, Sunuwars, Sherpas and others have invariably ceased to speak their mother tongues at home in Northeast India and have naturally adopted Nepali as their mother tongue as well as their language of formal communication at home and outside. There are other associated issues with this development. Some of the languages of the INOs had a rich body of literature and scripts of their own. Once these communities left their ancient traditional habitat in Nepal, their myths, legends, folk tales, etc. got lost. Moreover, there is a popular misconception in India that any body associated with Nepalese socio-cultural commonwealth is necessarily “Nepali” and must speak Nepali. The simple INOs, who invariably live a deprived life, hardly find time to correct various misconceptions and misgivings about themselves. Moreover, the issue of an appropriate nomenclature of the INOs is mixed with real or imagined history of community’s migration, need for a clear Indian identity distinct from the Nepalese, representation of their past Indian heritage, and an equally representative status along with various socio-cultural groups and sub-nationalities in India.

Nepal and India both continue to treat Madhesis and INOs in typically colonial style by denying the basic democratic rights and invariably treating them as non-existent citizens. The problem in India is that it is an open system, in which every ethnic group/ sub-nationality is to compete with others for political space and all types of resources. Though there are constitutional and political guarantees for equality among the communities/nationalities, this does not automatically ensure equality to

be translated in reality. Thus, in practice, some are more equal than others in terms of their political role, economic affluence, cultural attainments, and over-all indicators of social development. The INOs represent a miniscule community tugged in an economically backward corner in India, who is suspected with Nepalese citizenship in the eyes of many Indians. Their problems too are not taken seriously as worthy of national deliberation, as they are considered transient settlers. Needless to add that the community itself has not been able to help itself by tactfully articulating its grievances in a democratic and peaceful way to persuade others to come round to the community's stand point. The INOs must know that in an open society such as India, no body is ranged against them; rather rest of the ethnic groups/nationalities are engaged in enhancing their own bargaining power. The best people to learn from are their Nepalese counterpart, the Madhesi under-dogs, who have forced the hill Bahun-Chhetri-Newar power wielders during the last six months to take note of the Madhesi demands and ensure corrective steps for their redressal.

Most of the countries in Southasia are so busy with nation-building exercises around their dominant politico-ethnic ethos that marginal, minor, deviant, discordant and alleged historically antagonistic entities are seen as threat to the system and thus, are considered outside the "national concern" in an opaque way. Thus, one finds Hindus, Christians, Ahmedias, Muhajirs in Pakistan, Lhotshampas in Bhutan, Hindus and ethnic tribesmen in Bangladesh, Tamils in Sri Lanka, hill tribes and Rohangia Muslims in Myanmar, Nepamul Bharatiya, illegal Bangladeshi migrants, Kashmiri Hindu refugees in India and so on are just tolerated by the powers to be and their demands are considered to be "audacious". These ethnic groups are so much tied to the struggles for their daily existence that they hardly have time to think of ameliorating their miseries by taking up their issues at the institutional level. In fact, they neither have a spokesman for raising their voice, nor a leadership effective enough to fight for their cause. The welfare and non-governmental organizations come up in their favour, when there is a dramatic event to make it visible for their presence. In the normal day to day life, these groups are left to themselves. Even in the most democratically open systems, issues associated with these stocks do not find a mention, when national, regional or humanitarian problems are being debated. Moribund SAARC has not even considered the issues associated with these ethnic groups worthy of their deliberations. Nor is there a possibility of such thing happening in the near future, as such moves will immediately arouse national sentiments

to guard itself against an alleged sovereign authority to deliberate on the 'national issues' like these ethnic groups. So the question that may be asked at this juncture is this: In this apathetic situation, what do the INOs do to end their plight? They do not have very many options to exercise and they do not look ready for any.

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