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The Indians of Nepalese Origin and Security of the North East Region

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At the beginning of 2001, two events attracted my attention because of the alleged Nepalese involvement in them. Firstly, there were reports that a number of serving and former personnel of the Indian armed forces of Nepalese origin were arrested in Nepal and various locations in eastern Uttar Pradesh for their alleged involvement in anti-Indian espionage and subversive activities in league with a foreign power. Secondly, a near fatal attack was mounted on Subhash Ghising, the Chairman of the Darjeeling Hill District Council (DHDC) and Chief of the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) in broad daylight on his way to Darjeeling from Siliguri. The prime accused in the shootout fled to Nepal for safe sanctuary and allegedly associated with the Naga insurgents. Besides these two events, there have been frequent reports that the domiciled Nepalese are being recruited by the various insurgent groups from the Northeast India. My own study on Bhutan has enough evidence of the Nepalese role in subversive activities in Bhutan. Further more, the Bhutanese maintain that anti-national Lhotshampas have been ganging up with the ULFA and BLTF camps in Bhutan at as many as 32 locations.

This disjointed scenario does not fit into the popular image of a loyal, brave, dutiful and subservient soldier. That made me to think aloud on a number of related issues involving the

Indians of Nepalese origin (INOs-Nepamul Bhartiya). Their stereotypical image, churning among the Nepalese psyche and their quest for an identity are the issues which impinge on the security scenario of the North East frontier region of India. I had organised a workshop on the Indians of Nepalese origin at Shillong in March 2001 in which participants were mostly third generation Indian Nepalese from every state of the North East. It was an eye-opener to watch their concern, clarity of thought, aggression and impatience with the state of affairs.

The Popular Image of the INOs - Nepamul Bhartiya

Among the many images of the INO - Nepamul Bhartiya, there are two aspects which have popular universal acceptance: being an ideal soldier and an errand boy. The first category is based on the myth of the martial race invented by the British after the 1857 sepoy mutiny. The Gurkha soldier is one, who is known for his martial qualities, masculinity, loyalty, trust and defiance of all sorts of obstacles. They “are not merely brave warriors, they appear to have many other attributes of their (British) officers—courtesy, a sense of fair play, good humour, skill in games and good sportsmanship, an appreciation of honour, etc. They are in short, young gentlemen and their comparison to British school boys underlines precisely that point... (They are) the very opposite of enervated, effeminate and cowardly non-martial Hindus of India and Nepal.... They are rather honorary Europeans miniature versions of the officers themselves.... within the bounds of childhood and innocence” (Caplan, L:1995:149). This British construction of an ideal Gurkha soldier has largely been incorporated into the myth of the Gurkha martial lexicon by the Indians.

The second popular image of the INO - Nepamul Bhartiya is that of a smiling, ever-ready and always obliging *bahadur*. A short, cheerful, frugal, ill-paid homely boy, who is always

available all over North East India to do all sorts of unskilled jobs for a small compensation. He is popular gatekeeper (the *Gorkha*) at urban mansions, porter in the hills, herdsman on the marginal grazing grounds and of late the pimp to the teen age girls supplied from the hills to the metropolis. He does not talk; has invariably no family; lives literally on a pittance and is found in all kinds of unimaginable accommodation. He is on the margin of the crowded Indian social world. No significant social group associates itself with him. His songs, dances, dress—especially the cap and short knife—*khukheri* are unique to him as exotic. In short, he is a useful rustic marginal man, who lives for others.

Who is a Nepali?

Nepal is a relatively small country, but ethnologically it is a heterogeneous social world. Theoretically, it is the only Hindu kingdom in the world, but besides the Hindus, it has Budhmargis, Muslims, animists and of late, even Christians. Though the country's laws are based on the Hindu scriptures, there are a variety of ethnic groups, which are governed by their own traditional code. Besides Nepali, the official language of the state, the various ethnic groups speak their own tongues. To most of the Indians, the above heterogeneity seems blurred, Nepali is like Bengali or Malayali, a cultural linguistic group. The notion of being a Nepali has an inherent part of consciousness of the Nepalese people and its articulation is not always an easy one. There are problems in its articulation by the Nepalese as such and its acceptance by the 'others' as well (Subha, T.B.:2001).

For example, firstly, 'one who speaks the Nepali language' is a Nepali (ethnically speaking). But there are such Nepali speakers in India and Bhutan as well. Moreover, besides bilingual ethnic groups such as Gurung, Limbu, Rai, etc. among the Nepalese, Bhotia, Lepcha, Sherpa, etc. also speak Nepali,

but ethnically they do not belong to the Nepali stock. Secondly, there are a number of Nepalese who share common surnames with various Hindu castes in different cultural regions of India. Singh, Pande, Tiwari, Sharma, Bhandari, Adhikari, Shah, Pant, Joshi, Pradhan, Dixit, Das, Malla, Biswakarma, Rai and many more are not distinctively Nepalese. However, the Nepali Bahun, Chhetri and at least some of other castes have a distinct regional flavour. Thirdly, the country of their origin may indicate their identity. For example, the Nepalese are those, who come to India from Nepal. But at what point of time one must enter India is not clear to anybody. One must not forget the Treaty of Friendship, 1950 between India and Nepal which stipulates an open border between the two and right of each other's citizens to settle and own property in the country of domicile. The Indian Constitution emphasizes birth in India and parentage for awarding citizenship. By which criteria, numerous Nepali speakers may be considered citizens of both countries. Similarly, race, culture and religion are other inappropriate considerations on which Nepalese cannot be exclusively identified. Moreover, Kirati stock consisting of Limbu, Lepcha, Rai, Magar, etc. who are significant constituents of Nepalese, were the original settlers of Sikkim, which is a state in India.

A further complication has been added by the Indian Nepalese themselves. With a view to distinguishing themselves apart from Nepalese a number of terms were proposed: *Bharpali* (*Bharatiya Nepali*), *Bhargoli* (*Bhartiya Gorkhali*), *Nepali* (against settlers of Nepal, the Nepalese) and *Gorkha* (not the British Gurkha). None of them have been accepted either by the Indian Nepalese or by 'others' as appropriate nomenclature to the community. In this context, the most serious efforts were made by Subhash Ghising to describe the Indian Nepalese as the Gorkhas. This is not new. The All India Gorkha League (AIGL) formed at Dehradun in 1923 had been demanding a Gorkha homeland in India since then. Incidentally, the legendary Prithwi Narain Shaha was known as the

'Gorkha King' and his forces were known as the Gorkhas because he was from a small Nepalese principality of Gorkha. Furthermore, both the terms, 'Nepali' and 'Gorkha', are used for official purposes in India as well as Nepal.

Lahure – The Gorkha Soldiers

In the words of a Nepalese intellectual, a significant out-migration was linked with the increased population in the Nepal hills: "The decades of the 1600s had seen a sharp increase in hill population, thanks partly to New World imports such as maize and potato (which could provide much more prolific value per hectare and less efforts to grow than the indigenous foodgrains). The economic needs of this growing mass could not be met under the tributary system the feudals wished to maintain. To contain social pressure, therefore, they opened the doors to out-migration. Mercenary soldiers were allowed to join the imperial British Indian army, and mass migration of labourers began to the north Indian plains, the eastern Himalaya and as far as the sugarcane fields of the Fiji islands. The only assets these mercenaries and migrants brought with them to the market mill were their hands: (Gyalwali, D:1994:14). At the beginning of the 19th century, an appreciable number of Nepalese young men fought away from Nepal under non-Nepalese officers and offered themselves as professional soldiers by enlisting in the Sikh army of Raja Ranjit Singh. The term most commonly used by the Nepalese to denote a soldier serving in a foreign army came to be known as the Lahure (a soldier, who had returned from Lahore, the capital city of Raja Ranjit Singh), a corruption of Lahore. In course of time, many myths were created about the ferocious mercenary Gorkha – *lahures*.

The British were impressed by the tenacity of the Gorkha forces during the Anglo-Nepalese War, 1814-15 and decided to entice the hill men to an organised soldiering. The improv-

erished Gorkhas from the hills appreciated the gesture and preferred the secured return of being a British soldier than that of their earlier incarnation of a mercenary. With the change in the recruitment policy of the British after 1857, the Gorkhas were preferred as a model of crude innocence devoid of a questioning mind. The Victorian ethos of the age helped to create a myth out of proportion to the empirical reality. Thus, we find ideal Gorkha soldiers not among the less exposed, isolated, wild and hill tribes such as Magars, Gurungs, Rais and Limbus. Incidentally, the Nepalese laws considered them enslavable. The British appreciated the cruelty and brutality of these martial communities as fighting spirit and their status of unburdened by intelligence and education further endeared them to the colonial officers. Thus, a Gorkha soldier remains in a perpetual childhood (backward?) innocence and is largely a construct of the British mind.

The period between 1860 to 1940 saw the maximum recruitment of the Gorkhas in the British Indian army. Recruitment depots were opened at Dehradun, Gorakhpur, Laheriaserai, Darjeeling and Shillong exclusively for the Gorkha recruitment. Nepal was treated as if it was a soldiers' farm. So much emphasis was placed on the ideal suitability of the hill martial communities for the recruitment that even the children of the Gorkha soldiers at various cantonments in India were contemptuously rejected as the lines boys not suitable for the forces. Undoubtedly, the Gorkha settlement colonies in North East India were treated as suitable for coolie corps and errand boys required for the forces. The British army officers were certain that the Gorkhas would serve only under their command and once they withdrew from the Indian army, there would be a crisis of leadership. However, they were in for a shock once the results of the referendum held among the Gorkha regiments before Indian independence was announced. The bulk of the Gorkha soldiers preferred to remain as an integral part of the Indian army. And ultimately, six out of ten regiments continued

to be part of the Indian army and the rest were taken as the British Gurkhas. A point to be noted here is that besides the army, an appreciable number of Nepalese were recruited in the para military forces such as the Assam Rifles.

Ethnological Nepalese

From an ethnological point of view, the Gorkha or the Nepalese can be divided into three major stocks. Firstly, the *Thakuris* or the *Gorkhalis* from ancient principalities of Baisi and Chaubisi as the Indian counterparts of the fourfold caste system who claimed to have migrated to Nepal from India during the Muslim rule in India. These are proud Hindus divided into endogamous castes, follow caste hierarchy, ritual purity and religious pollution. The Brahmins, the Nepalese bahuns, have been spokesmen and the role setters of the Nepalese Hindu model of world view. The Chhetris, derived from the Kshatriya, are the rulers of Nepal and have contributed immensely to the consolidation of the Nepalese nation. Though they are found in all parts of Nepal, they are settled mainly in the Western, Central region and the Kathmandu valley. They are immensely proud of Hinduism, their martial tradition and they project themselves as the protectors of the Hindu traditions. Besides the Brahmin and Kshatriya Varnas, there are a number of trading, occupational and artisan castes spread all over Nepal as an inseparable element of the rural economy. Among them, mention may be made of Kami, Saraki, Damai who work on metal, stone and leather, etc., tailor clothes and play music on religious and social occasions.

Secondly, the Newars, located mainly in Kathmandu valley and Eastern Nepal, are divided into a number of castes among themselves. They were also the rulers of the Kathmandu valley before the present Shah dynasty. They possess their own language, script, architecture, art and craft. They follow Buddhism and Hinduism and their contribution to a distinct

Nepalese tradition is immense. It is an enterprising stock providing a social bridge between the *Thakuris* and the Kirati stocks. Thus, they form one of the pillars of the three-tier Nepalese ruling elite—the Bahun-Chhetri-Newar.

Thirdly, the Kiratis, claimed to be the earliest settlers of the land—the *Janajatis*—the auchthonous tribesmen of Nepal, are divided into a number of endogamous tribes such as Rai, Magar, Limbu, Tamang, Sunawar, etc. They are either animist, Hindu or Buddhist, speak their own tongues, and are settled in the eastern and north eastern part of Nepal. By tradition, they are hill men, fond of forests, are nearly omnivorous and are ethnologically closer to the tribals of North East India. Incidentally, they form the bulk of the Gorkha martial race and are preferred as army recruits. At another plane, the Nepalese society is divided into two notional social worlds: the *tagadharis* (those who are entitled to the sacred thread, the high caste Hindus) and the *matwalis* (those, who are permitted to drink intoxicant beverages and, thus, are outside the caste orthodoxy). Needless to add that Kiratis, Newaris and a significant segment of the Gorkhalis are considered to be *matwalis* (Sinha, A.C.: 1990:221).

Immigration of the Nepalese to Northeast India

The British found the Nepalese as an effective tool in their hands, who could serve as the cushion and contain the Bhotia aristocracy in Sikkim and Bhutan (Risley, H.H.:1894). Even before that, they were recruited in the various constabulary forces, which went on pacification expeditions in the tribal areas of Assam hills. Col. Shakespeare records the unique role of the Nepalese in the *Assam Rifles*, custodian of the region. The Nepalese constituted as much as half of its forces and by 1865, the Nepalese *Khukheri* was accepted as its emblem which continues to be embossed today (Shakespeare, Col.W.L.:1977). We have noted above that the Nepalese began to be recruited

soon after the Sugawlee Treaty, 1815, but it gained momentum only after 1857. However, the Nepalese peasants, herdsman, traders, lumbermen and even unskilled labour were first encouraged to move to Darjeeling from the 1840s and then to the Assam hills. Similarly, from 1865 onwards, the Nepalese were welcomed by the British to be active in Sikkim and Bhutan and from the 1890s they were legally permitted to settle in the two Himalayan states. So much so that within a century the Nepalese constitute at least two-third of the population of Sikkim, Darjeeling and Lhotshampa inhabited five districts of southern Bhutan.

Before the British annexation of Assam, there is no appreciable Nepalese settlement in the North East region. Within the next 175 years not a single state of the region is without Nepalese settlements. It is instructive to know the social background of the Nepalese settlers in the North East:

i. The Gorkha Settlement Colonies and the Ex-Soldiers: After their release from the armed forces, a number of Nepalese were encouraged to settle down around the army stations. Besides the other agencies, the *Assam Rifles* alone established 40 re-settlement colonies to settle as much as 3,000 Gorkha ex-soldiers in the region: Assam-13, Manipur-8, Mizoram-7, Nagaland-7, Arunachal-3, Meghalaya-1 and Tripura-1. Some of these sites such as Sadiya in Assam, Matripokhari in Manipur, Aizwal in Mizoram and Mokochung in Nagaland are about 125 years old. Most of the settlers have adapted themselves completely to the local situation in such a way that they are counted among the indigenous people with all the benefits given to the Scheduled Tribes. They have shown a great capacity to assimilate themselves with the hill communities. Besides their own, they speak the language of the host communities, contract inter-community marriages occasionally and turn out to be an inseparable part of the local economy.

These ex-soldiers were encouraged to settle down in the foothills, forest fringes and other strategic points on the frontiers—in this way certain compact pockets of Nepalese settlements in Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Nagaland and Manipur have emerged. The new settlers with their peasant background and military discipline acquired an image of loyal citizens with pro-establishment orientations. With their hard work, perseverance and investment of their retirement benefits in agriculture, they have been able to turn out their newly acquired settlements as thriving centres of prosperous peasantry. Their apparent and visible prosperity among the relatively indolent and less achievement-oriented indigenous communities attract envy. There is another aspect of the ex-soldiers' presence in the region. A number of settlements are located in the areas, where there is a considerable movement of armed forces to contain the extremist and secessionist activities. The host communities occasionally accuse the settlers of providing information on strategy and logistics to the armed forces. In such situations, the settlers suffer at the hands of the local insurgent groups. Such examples of intimidation, violence, arson and eviction from Manipur, Nagaland, Mizoram and Assam can easily be enumerated.

ii. Peasants and Graziers/Herdsman: The non-martial Nepalese—especially the illiterate, poor Bahun peasants—move out of the Nepal hills in search of opportunities alone or in small groups of unskilled labourers or herdsman. The only capital he carries with himself are his personal qualities such as cheerfulness, perseverance and sturdiness, ubiquitous *khukheri* and a willingness to do anything to make a living. Such marginal men very easily combine a number of roles in themselves as graziers, labourers, porters, axemen, sharecroppers and even as errand boys. They locate themselves invariably away from the tribal village on uninhabited forest fringe, when they come to the hills. Often they are guilty of felling forests, grazing illegally and even settling down on

reserve forests in connivance with the local tribesmen. With their hard labour, frugal habits, perseverance and industriousness they make a difficult living. Their roles in local economy turn out to be significant complementary one. Their near cosmopolitan social outlook, frugal food habits and prevalence of polygamy help them to integrate locally. The number of wives a Nepali may have added to his biological and economic prosperity. "The Nepalese are phenomenally fertile people, it is not unusual to find among them families where there are four to five wives and 20 to 30 children" (Rustomji, N.K.:1971:171).

The Nepalese easily enmesh in a fast changing agrarian scenario from shifting cultivation to settled and then even to cash crop cultivation. Besides the Nepalese labour, their cattle also contribute manure, plough and meat to the local population. Slowly but steadily, they are found occupying agricultural lands which, as per local practice, are communal property. While the local tribal shifting cultivator remains a marginal peasant like his forefathers, the newcomer Nepalese have added to a modest affluence. Naturally, the tribesmen feel that the Nepalese were alienating them from their patrimony, while the Nepalese plead that their modest affluence had a long story of exploitation by the local people. Here is a potential and an explosive area of conflict the immigrants and auchthonous communities over the question of land ownership. Against the legal and constitutional protection to the tribal rights, any role of the Nepalese ownership over local resources such as land and forests easily appears to be encroachment. Further, the local scheduled tribes have developed an ambivalent attitude to the Nepalese, which does not help the Nepalese in their hours of crisis. In such a situation, communal flare-up leading to violence, which has become a recurrent phenomena, is not difficult to imagine. We have enumerated instances of violent clashes between the Nepalese and the local communities elsewhere (Sinha, A.C.:1982:91).

iii. Artisans and Semi-skilled Professionals: There is a sizeable Nepalese population floating in urban centres, who are employed in various semi-skilled labour intensive professions. Some of them are engaged in caste occupations such as carpenters, smith and traders. In the absence of caste bound professionals among the tribals, the Nepalese have easily stepped into fill the role of intermediary semi-skilled professionals between the unskilled locals and skilled white collars from elsewhere. With the emphasis on developmental activities on increase, demand for semi-skilled persons has been on increase in the region. Thus, new professions of plumbers, electricians, cleaners, masons, mechanics, drivers, scavengers, porters, watchmen, cooks, etc. have emerged in the hill areas of the region. For most of these chores, the obvious choice is the Nepalese, who invariably combines a number of roles into their person on a modest remuneration.

The type of work in which the Nepalese are engaged are relatively new to the region. Unlike their peasant and soldier farmer counterparts, the semi-skilled urban Nepalese are scattered in the towns keeping in mind the availability of jobs they are engaged in. They rarely come into conflict with the local community because of their inexpensive relevant skills locally required by almost everybody. Moreover, the urban Nepalese lead a near cosmopolitan life in which their expenses are in tune with their income. They do not arouse the envy of their neighbours, because they rarely add to an appreciable affluence. They join their Hindu, Buddhist and Christian counterparts for social, cultural and religious celebrations unlike their rural counterparts. Being a Nepali does not help them in an appreciable way to get the jobs they do; rather their skills are being marketed. Thus, in spite of their significant contribution to the local economy, they maintain a submerged identity.

iv. The White Collar and the Educated Youth : This newly emerged category is born, brought up and educated in

the region. They have friends, patrons and even enemies from among the indigenous communities and they are invariably affiliated to the local voluntary associations. They know the north east as their only home and speak the local dialects besides their own mother tongues. Most of them have never been to Nepal and, in fact, they have lost all ties from that land. These third and fourth generation Indians of Nepalese origin vividly remember the sufferings of their forefathers. They are born Indians like their neighbours and behave like average Indians struggling at every stage to make a living. They are politically aware and culturally conscious of their status in the state of their domicile and the Indian union as the citizen. Moreover, they are the individuals, who compete with the local aspirants for the scarce white collar jobs, which invariably go to the indigenous communities. Thus, they are unconsciously made aware that they do not belong to the local dominant communities, for whom there are constitutional guarantees in jobs and welfare schemes.

The egos of the educated INOs- Nepamul Bhartiya are hurt at every step in everyday life. Naturally, they begin identifying themselves with the great Gorkha past, Hindu traditionalism and various aspects of the pan-Nepalese solidarity movements. Naturally, they provide leadership for airing the genuine and putative grievances of the community. Such behaviours generate suspicion in the eyes of the local communities wielding power in the state. The constitutionally guaranteed fundamental rights to organise themselves, express the opinions on the issues affecting them and agitate for the democratic rights are considered inimical by the local indigenous communities. Thus, these INOs- Nepamul Bhartiya are pushed to the status of an 'other'—the enemy—conspiring against the interest of the sons of the soil. A little provocation is sufficient to ignite violence in such a surcharged ethnic atmosphere. And it is the INOs - Nepamul Bhartiya, who are always at the receiving end.

The Confused Reactions of the INOs

The INOs - Nepamul Bhartiya naturally consider Nepal as their ethnic, racial, linguistic and cultural fount. The king, the 5 Shree Maharajadhiraj, the incarnation of Lord Vishnu on the earth, is the only Hindu king in the world. The INOs take pride that the king's precursors remained independent even during the Mughal and the British rule in India. In fact, India is contemptuously referred to as Mughlan by the highbrow orthodox Hindu Nepalese. So much so that they perform purificatory rituals once they return from a travel to Mughlan, the unclean land. However, the INOs - Nepamul Bhartiya do not see a contradiction in their orientation to Nepal and reference to the Nepalese king and their being citizens of secular India. But they also realise that the Nepalese regime is not in a position to help them get their real or putative grievances redressed against the Indian state. They know that in the ethnically crowded Indian union they have themselves to negotiate their status suitable to their aspirations. For that they have reacted in the following manner:

a. The Issue of the Maha Nepal – the Greater Nepal: The kingdom of Nepal was secured by Prithwi Narain Shah's vision by integrating multi-ethnic groups through strong arms, Hindu ethos, caste system and the Gorkhali language. He prided himself on being called the king of the hills – *parbat ka raja*. His successors overran the central Himalayan principalities between river Sutlej in the west and the Teesta in the east. He and his successors had a vision to invade even the Koch and Ahom kingdoms in the Brahmaputra valley in association with Bhutan. From the 1790s they even ruled over the territories between Sikkim to Uttaranchal for about two decades. It was their misfortune that they collided with the emerging British Indian empire leading to the Anglo-Nepal War, 1814-15. What resulted at the end of the war were the present boundaries of Nepal and the beginning of the Gorkha recruit-

ment in the British Indian army. But the past empirical glory got stuck in the Nepalese psyche that they had ruled over the entire central Himalaya, which they identified with Maha Nepal – the Greater Nepal. In course of time, the Nepalese settled at Dalhausie, Landsdowne, Kangra, Simla, Dehradun, Darjeeling, Shillong and various other ‘stations’, where the British had their army cantonments.

Kanak Mani Dixit explains the background and poses the problem of Nepalese concentration in the Himalayan region: “Even if the historical Greater Nepal went into eclipse, there began a process of migration out of the central Himalaya, which would lead to demographic conflicts more than a century later.... the pressures of the state (of Nepal) on the ethnic and other hill communities increased dramatically. Political repression, economic exploitation and possibly, over population, pushed peasants eastwards along the hills and Duars towards the Indian North East, where the British needed Nepali brawn to harvest timber and to open up territories for settlement and tea gardens. Over decades and well into the 1900s, Nepalis became heavily concentrated in the lower hills of Sikkim, Bhutan and the Duars. In lesser numbers, they extended themselves right across the north east and as far as today’s Mynamar. Would this scattered community of Nepali labour/peasantry ever come together to form a Greater Nepal?” Then he traces the genesis of the idea in recent years. Way back in the 1950s poet Dharam Raj Thapa gave it a poetic expression:

“What happened to us Nepalis?
Our songs have all been lost.
We did take Sutlej and Kangra.
But today our voice is heard no more”

Then in July 1991 a ‘Greater Nepal Committee’ was formed in Kathmandu and the editor of a little known Kathmandu weekly, Surendra Dhakal, issued a letter to some

embassies as a member of the Committee. The objectives of the committee were “to create a worldwide public opinion in favour of the Greater Nepal and to achieve it.” A plea was made on behalf of the committee that India should restore unconditionally to Nepal the territories east of the Mechi river and west of the Mahakali. All the major Nepalese political parties have publicly decried the above demand so much so that former Prime Minister, Girija Prasad Koirala, termed the demand as ‘the product of the unsound mind.’ Dixit notes that the bogey of the Greater Nepal is raised more vigorously outside Nepal. Subhash Ghising in Darjeeling, Dawa Tshering in Thimphu, Bengali chauvinistic elements in Calcutta, and even former bureaucrats such as B.S. Das in Delhi have expressed their apprehensions on the possibility of a Greater Nepal. However, nobody has come out with evidence that it has taken the shape of a movement among the INOs - Nepamul Bhartiya.

We feel comfortable with Dixit’s conclusion that while it is the language that binds the Nepali speakers of South Asia, it is a weak thread. The feeling of Nepaliness in the Nepali diaspora is culturally changed, but not politically (Dixit, K.M.:1993). Furthermore, no public men of stature have made a demand for the Greater Nepal, which has to be necessarily at the cost of Indian territory. Even Subhash Ghising, etc. have charged the Nepalese design on the Indian territory, but nobody from Indian soil, at least no known Indians of Nepalese origin, have demanded or supported creation of the Greater Nepal. Thus, we feel that while a large portion of population of the region is able to appropriate the cultural attributes of Nepaliness, the feel does not go deep enough to emerge as a movement for Greater Nepal in the near future, posing a threat to the national boundaries of South Asian states.

b. The Demand for a Gorkha Homeland : The oldest INO - Nepamul Bhartiya organisation in India, All India Gorkha League (AIGL), established at Dehradun in 1923, demanded a Nepali-speaking state in India for the INOs. In course of

time, the AIGL concentrated more on Darjeeling and the Duar. So much so that in the emotionally surcharged period of the 1940s, the AIGL even demanded the areas to be integrated to Nepal in event of Assam going to Pakistan. The State Reorganisation Commission did not find in 1956 the demand of a Nepali-speaking state in India acceptable and since then the AIGL remained a political party with limited following in the Darjeeling hills. The credit for reviving the demand for a Gorkha homeland—Gorkhaland—rightly goes to Subhash Ghising in the 1980s to the GNLF leader. The GNLF populist movement turned violent and intimidating cutting Darjeeling hills, Sikkim and Bhutan from the rest of India in terms of communication. In an enigmatic and dramatic way, Ghising termed the INOs into Gorkhas, their language as the Gorkhali and their imagined state to be the Gorkhaland. This move led to farther controversy and confusion among the INOs—Nepamul Bhartiya. Ghising's agitation resulted in the establishment of the Darjeeling Hills District Council (DHDC) in West Bengal and Ghising was elected as its Chairman.

Once the Gorkhaland movement settled for a peaceful DHDC, the GNLF got divided into a number of rival factions. A number of GNLF activists were not reconciled to the peaceful role and took to arms. This was the time the Lhotshampa trouble started in Bhutan (Sinha, A.C.:1991:2001). Many of the former GNLF members assisted the Lhotshampa in a variety of ways. The turmoils in Darjeeling hills and Bhutan Duars did not leave even tiny INO dominated Sikkim untouched. Even an academic plea to revive the old Bhotia state of Sukhim consisting of Darjeeling and Sikkim as a possible INO homeland generated apprehensions (Sinha, A.C.:1995). The suggestion raised many apprehensions in the Indian press (Dutta, S:1996) and it was seen as a conspiracy to take Darjeeling, Sikkim and Duar away from India. It was even linked to the demand of the Greater Nepal. However, whether one likes it or not, the demand for an INO homeland

has got a strong support from the INOs of the North East, because in their hours of frequent evictions from their settlements they see such a homeland as their possible sanctuary. The INOs know that even if the demand for their homeland is accepted it cannot contain all the INOs within its boundaries. However, its supporters from the North East feel that they would always look to an Indian Nepali homeland as a support base in the hours of their distress.

c. The Identity of the INOs-Nepamul Bhartiya : The popular image of a Gorkha in India is either of a mercenary soldier or a modest watchman. However, we have seen above that the Nepalese are a complex, sophisticated and cultured people. Many of them are bilingual and multi-lingual. Even religiously all of them are not necessarily Hindus. It is not a cohesive community. As long as the migrants were not aware of their rights as Indians, it mattered little what others thought of them. Anyway, they were earning their bread with hard labour and they hardly had time to think of their rights, their future and destiny of their offspring. However, time has changed and with a five-decade long association of the Indian democratic system, the INOs—specially educated and white collar professionals among them—are anxious about their identity. Though culturally they do not have any other label, they are sure that legally they are not Nepalese. Then what type of Indians are they? In case of the North East, they are not counted among the Scheduled Tribals, though they lived with them for over a century. Then they are not among the Scheduled Castes, but what about Karmis, Sarakis, Damais among them? Why are these Nepalese untouchable castes not listed with the Scheduled Castes? While talking to some sympathetic beings they are loosely referred as the counterparts of Punjabis, Gujaratis or Malayalis. But once more such apparent similarities confuse the INOs. These Indian sub-nationalities have their homeland (states) in India, which provide a support base to their brethren in hours of need.

The Indian Union has a so-called and much maligned mainstream which may conveniently be identified with that of the Gangetic Plain—the cow belt or the BIMARU states of the demographers. In other words, this is the land of predominantly Hindus, Hindi language and the classical Hindustan. There are intimate associates to this core: Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, Bengal, Assam, Tripura and Manipur, etc. which are mainly Hindu, non-Hindi speaking and outside Hindustan, but within the classical Bharatvarsha. Then there are peripheral regions, which are predominantly non-Hindu, non-Hindi speakers and possibly beyond but vaguely on the frontiers of Bharatvarsha. Where do the INOs locate themselves? They fit into the role of the associates to the core, but Nepal which is the fount of the INOs, zealously guards its distinctiveness. Naturally, the Indian mainstream accords a peripheral role to the INOs without providing constitutional privileges as done in the case of other communities. This opaque zone of politico-cultural identification has created havoc to the psyche of the present generation of educated INOs-Nepamul Bhartiya.

The Security Scenario vis-à-vis the INOs

India east of the Siliguri chicken neck is in turmoil. Ranging from Darjeeling and Duars to Arakan hills on Mizoram frontiers no state is without violent agitation or insurgency. In these states the traditional leadership has lost its grip and a newly emerged transitional elite find it difficult to cope with the battery of changes forthcoming to them. Five decades long democratic dispensation has further heightened their expectations. Civic society wedded to democracy is nowhere visible and the traditional tribal social base has been usurped by an aggressive, impatient and ambitious young generation. This young generation feels that all the welfare measures are not good enough and the Indian state has not done enough for them. In fact,

there is a section among them, who believe that the Indian state has replaced the British colonial power. Such a mental frame easily accepts armed rebellion as a logical alternative to a time consuming democratic process. Once such a course is chosen, the Indian state is seen as an evil institution; anybody, who stands with the Indian state is labelled as an alien agent and the armed forces are to be harassed with hit and hide tactics. They impose a reign of terror and intimidation on peaceful citizens, who take an easy recourse to withdraw silently. This explains the background in which insurgency breeds in the North East. Where do the INOs - Nepamul Bhartiya fit in this scenario?

The khaki uniform of a soldier and a watchman is no more attractive enough to the INOs - Nepamul Bhartiya and they are no more content with the marginal role assigned to them. The mental churning among the INO youth is on. When they see that their tribal playmates have been given place of privilege or taken to arms, and they are being rejected even by the regiments of their grandfathers for the lowly job of a soldier, they feel angry to say the least. They get utterly confused and ask themselves: What type of Indians are they? In the absence of patronage, how do they survive in such a surcharged atmosphere? Then comes the shock: as the progenies of the ex-soldier settlers they are seen as the natural allies of the evil (or civil) state by the local dissenters. In this unsettled, ambiguous and unemployed background, the INO youth may easily be roped in by their playmates-turned insurgents as warriors and conspirators in anti-state activities. In such a way it is possible that the loyal Gorkha has now taken to arms against the institutions for which their forefathers proudly shed their blood. This explains the nexus of the alleged arm traffic between Kathmandu, Dhaka, Bangkok and across the porous borders in the North East.

In the words of a '*Nepamul Bhartiya*' (INO), they are subjected to numerous predicaments of being the citizens of

a 'privileged nation', e.g. India. The INOs and the Indians at large, both together, have to provide them with a distinct identity, separate from the subjects of Nepal. A case for example is that of the Lhotshampas from that of Bhutan. Further, nuances of the Indo-Nepalese Treaty, 1950 and the open border between the two countries have to be kept in mind. Secondly, with eclipse of the concept of martial race, myth of the Gorkha soldiers also need to be looked at. In case we do not get ideal recruits—either from Maoist polluted Nepal or insurgency infected North East—for turning them into ideal Gorkha soldiers, how safe is it to leave the internal peace and external security in their hands? Thirdly, the INO settlements in the North East must not be left to them. They are already in bad shape. Before this former chain of security turns into a chain of security risk, a policy has to be evolved to galvanise these settlements into national ethos. This is possible only when the settlers' offsprings' genuine aspirations and expectations are taken care of. Otherwise, they are subjected to frequent evictions by power to be and New Delhi's insensitivity. "The Nepalese will learn to adopt and live, (will) not leave (the region). And they leave if they must, they will return soon after as they did in 1979 and 1987" (Subba, T.B.:2001).

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