

# THE NEPALIS IN ASSAM

Ethnicity and cross border  
movements in the north-east



Lopita Nath

MAULANA ABUL KALAM AZAD INSTITUTE  
OF ASIAN STUDIES, KOLKATA

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## PREFACE

Ethnicity and cross-border movements have become important parameters in the study of immigrant communities. In a multi-ethnic society like Assam, the pivotal state in the North-eastern part of the Indian sub-continent peopled by cross-border movements at various points of her history, this forms an important aspect of study. Colonial intervention in the 18<sup>th</sup> century created conditions, which generated large-scale movements of labour and enterprise across borders. An important movement of the South Asian people was that of the Nepalis since the turn of the century into the neighbouring areas of Sikkim, Bhutan, Assam, Myanmar, etc. The Nepalis in Assam owe their presence in the region to history, imperialism and a porous border. In the pre-colonial times the inflows were smaller and the people assimilated imperceptibly into the host society. With colonialism, however the flows were larger and assimilation much more complex. The flows have however continued right upto the present times, adding to the complexities of the situation. But Assam, which was earlier land-abundant and sparsely populated, had always displayed a tremendous capacity for accommodating the various migrants into its fold. It was only in the present century that a certain amount of resistance was noticed in their attitude to the immigrant communities. The Nepalis who have been living in Assam for generations and have immensely contributed to the socio-economic and political development of the region in their own way, began to feel the tensions in the post-colonial period, more so in the present times. The outcome of these tensions were the growth of an ethnic identity consciousness. In our study, an attempt is made to study the Nepali community in Assam and trace the growth of their ethnic minority identity in the post-colonial socio-political scenario in Assam. For an outsider to the community, every effort has been made to study the community objectively. Since, no study, more so on minority groups are above controversy, we would however like to clear our position by stating that it is a pioneering effort in this field. As such, it is not above limitations and does not claim to be the final verdict on the situation.

**ORGANISATION OF THE STUDY**

Chapter I is an introduction to the study, It begins with an understanding of the various concepts of ethnicity, ethnic identity and migration to build a general paradigm on which the Nepalis in Assam could be studied. This chapter also tries to diagnose the problem and find a solution to the problem stated. Chapter II deals with an analysis of the history of the Nepali homeland. Here an attempt has been made to look at the relations between India and Nepal since the early times. In Chapter III, we have studied the Nepali migration to Assam and the various causative factors of this migration in the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods. Chapter IV deals with the assimilation of the Nepalis into the Assamese society. An attempt has also been made here to look into the connections which the Nepalis in Assam have with their homeland. Here, we have argued that the Nepali migrants in Assam are permanent migrants and their long stay in the region have served to sever all ties with their homeland. As such these 2 to 3 generations of Nepalis have almost become Assamised in their outlook. Chapter V traces the growth of an identity consciousness of the Nepalis in Assam to the post-colonial nativist and separatist insurgency movements in Assam. We have argued here that subsequent to the Assam and the Bodo movements not only did the process of Nepali assimilation receive a severe setback but also led to a re-examination and subsequent assertion of Nepali identity in Assam for the first time in the post-colonial period. The Conclusion, through an overview of all the chapters considers whether the movement for Nepali identity had any separatist tendencies. It also tries to consider under what conditions in the aftermath of these tensions can the Nepalis and the Assamese peacefully co-exist.

Lopita Nath,  
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## CHAPTER - I

### INTRODUCTION

POPULATION MOVEMENTS on a grand scale have become a prominent feature of contemporary society, but there have been as yet relatively few attempts to look beneath the mass movements of people and trace the connecting link between the movements of people and ethnicity. Cross border movements of people often defined as migration has played an important role in the development of ethnicity and ethnic identity. The races, which have moved away to far off places from their original places of residence often maintain a common cultural tradition and a sense of identity, keeping certain markers like dress, language, lifestyle, existing as a sub-group of a larger society. This inter-relationship between the two concepts has often been used to study group of people, like the Nepalis in India and Assam. Migrant groups in India and Assam, who have kept their own identity markers intact, have emerged as a strong ethnic group in the country. A definition of the concepts of ethnicity and migration will lead to a better understanding of the relationship of ethnicity and cross-border movements and the growth of an ethnic identity among the Nepalis in Assam.

#### ETHNICITY AND ETHNIC IDENTITY

Few would argue that there has been an unprecedented upsurge of ethnicity in the past two decades. Beginning with the Civil Rights Movement in the United States in the 1960s and the Brixton riots in Britain in the 1980s in the west, it also touched the east, specially India with the secessionist movement of the Sikhs of Punjab, the Gorkhas in Darjeeling, the Mizos in the North-east and others. These incidents are witness to the fact that ethnicity is a powerful motivating factor interwoven into the very fabric of everyday life. Yet, the term has only recently come into common parlance. David Reisman first used it in 1953; but as Glazer and Moynihan (1975)<sup>1</sup> points out, it makes its appearance in the Oxford English Dictionary only in 1972.

Many definitions of ethnicity emphasize a common cultural pattern;



which separates the ethnic group from other immediate groups. But Milton Gordon (1964)<sup>2</sup> referred to ethnicity as a 'sense of peoplehood' created by common race, religion, national origin, history or some combination of these. This definition of a group of individuals with a 'shared sense of peoplehood' is based on presumed shared socio-cultural experiences and/or similar physical characteristics viewed by members themselves or by outsiders. Yet, it should be noted that cultural factors may change over time due to contact and assimilation, but a sense of separateness and distinctive ethnicity persists, the process of self-ascription and identification remains. Ethnic groups may thus become behaviourally assimilated while yet maintaining a strong sense of ethnic identity. The focus has thus shifted from cultural factors to the persistence and maintenance of ethnic boundaries and the continuing dichotomization between members and outsiders. In this light, ethnicity is not so much a product of common living, as a product of self-awareness of one's belonging in a particular group and one's distinctiveness with regard to other groups.

As observed by Glazer and Moynihan<sup>3</sup>, (a) ethnic identities have replaced occupational identities as a source of self-esteem; (b) ethnic loyalties are increasingly affected by political events pitting one ethnic group against another, (c) ethnicity has taken the role of religion as a means of establishing one's identity.

The concept of ethnic identity is defined in part as the sense of personal identification with the ethnic group and the identification by others as being a member of the ethnic group. This identification is based on a number of criteria, including culture, history, language, religion and geographical location. This tends to evoke a sense of loyalty to one's group. Thus, ethnic identity is that component of a person's self-definition, which is derived from affiliation with a specific group. As Timsina writes ethnic identity is a sense of solidarity on the basis of a certain ethos, ethnicity is a symbol of peoplehood, these together may be called the 'ethnic identity system'.<sup>4</sup> Another aspect of ethnic identity is their minority position in the society. Ethnic groups are often, though not always minority groups. Most Theorists (Morris 1968, Taj

fel 1978) underline the fact that minority peoples not only feel themselves bound together by race, nationality, culture, common history, but also share a common fate and common experiences of discrimination and social disadvantage, all of which serve to strengthen in-group cohesiveness and solidarity and to enhance self-consciousness of their minority group membership. The essential difference between definitions of ethnic groups and minority groups lies in the implication of a serious imbalance in power and prestige. Their differences from the dominant group and relative deficiency in power and resources excludes them most often from societal participation. Although minority identity has numerical connotations, in the sociological sense, minority groups are not always a numerical minority (eg. Blacks in U. S. A. or the Bantu in South Africa). But their restrictions on their rights and relatively weak power position have cast them in the minority group. Thus, ethnic groups are not always minorities, while most minority groups are ethnic groups, defined in some instances by shared culture, by shared ideology— political or by a persistence of group boundaries. But in most instances they suffer from low status and lack of power relative to the majority.

Ethnic minorities are usually recognizable primarily because they maintain their cultural identity. The pulls of culture and tradition from within the group contribute to a large extent to the persistence and maintenance of ethnic boundaries. For ethnic minorities, boundaries are often drawn from within the group itself and are consequently maintained from within. Thus, ethnic minority identity encompasses the whole gamut of social psychological relations involved in being a member of a group that is subordinate or relatively disadvantaged in society but which also has cultural mores and traditions that contribute to its maintenance.

An essential component of ethnic minority identity, which is often used as a cultural boundary is language. In a multi-lingual society like India, language is an important base of group identity formation. As such the linguistic identity of a group strengthen group unity while distinguishing them from others. In India, the linguistic identity is an important aspect of ethnic minority identification and this in turn has led

to movements for preservation and proper recognition of language.

### CROSS BORDER MOVEMENTS OR MIGRATION

Closely related to ethnicity and ethnic studies are the movements of people or migration. A very important component of population change, migration is known as the movement of people from one permanent residence to another permanent or temporary residence for a substantial period of time by breaking social and cultural ties. The term has been defined in the New Webster's dictionary as 'the act or an instance of moving from one country, region or place to settle in another'<sup>5</sup>. This is a simple shift in physical space or change of domicile by a man or groups or people. Different scholars have tried to define migration according to their own approaches. Eisenstadt looks at migration as "the physical transition of an individual or a group from one society to another. This transition usually involves abandoning one social setting and entering another and permanent one"<sup>6</sup>. This definition does not consider a return to the former society or maintaining a social membership thereof. Mangalam defined migration "as a relatively permanent moving away of a collectively called migrants from one geographical location to another preceded by decision making on the part of the migrant on the basis of hierarchically ordered set of values or valued ends and resulting in changes in the interactional system of the migrant"<sup>7</sup>. Kammeyar<sup>8</sup> also defines migration similarly. These definitions stressing on the 'relatively permanent', emphasizes the point that most migrants move in search of employment.

Today the scope is much wider. It connotes a change of residence and crossing an administrative boundary in the process. As such any cross-border movements of people for permanent or temporary residence (due to various causative factors like population pressure, employment or political intervention) can be defined as migration. This type of migration, which involves the crossing of international borders, is known as international migration. The present study is concerned with this aspect of migration.

International migration is entirely induced or impelled by a number

of factors. The chief cause can be attributed to economy and means of livelihood. The area of unavailability of the means of livelihood pushed people while the productive and resourceful areas attract migrants. Similarly, various political as well as socio-cultural factors influence the population movements across borders. But the magnitude of migration is highly responsive to the 'push and pull' factors. The following Push and Pull factors' are listed as the general causative factors of migration, although they might vary according to area or regions.

Push factors are: (1) Decline in the national resources; (2) Loss of employment; (3) Oppressive or repressive discriminatory treatment; (4) Alienation from a community because one no longer subscribes to prevailing belief, customs or mode of behaviour within the community; (5) Retreat from a community because it offers few or no opportunity for personal development, employment or marriage; (6) Retreat from a community because of natural calamities like flood, drought, earthquake, epidemic, etc.

Pull factors are: (1) Superior opportunities for employment in one's occupation to enter a preferred occupation; (2) Opportunities to earn a larger income; (3) Opportunities to obtain desired specialized education or training; (4) Preferable environment and living conditions—topography, site, climate, houses, etc. (5) Dependency movement such as migration of bride to join her husband; (6) Lure of new or different activities, environment, etc.<sup>9</sup>

The 'push and pull' hypothesis has been used to explain many cross-border population movements. The area of repulsion act as push factor while the area of attraction acts as pull factors of migration.

#### ASSIMILATION: AS A CONSEQUENCE OF MIGRATION

The consequences of migration are felt both on permanently settled people and on the migrants themselves. Change in demographic composition, cultural fusion, mutual progress, economic development of nations, adjustment to the new environment and growth of an international co-operation has been regarded as some of the effects of migra-

tion<sup>10</sup>. One other consequence is Assimilation. Despite ambiguity in usage or the term and the controversies surrounding it, assimilation continues to be an important concept for students of both, ethnicity and migration. Migration, as earlier defined, from one society to another, from one country to another, generates a need to mix and adjust in the new society or country. This process, which can be either peaceful or coercive and reduces the differences between the migrants and the host society, can be termed assimilation. It can best be defined as a process of boundary reduction between societies, ethnic groups or smaller social groups. It is a descriptive and not an evaluative concept. While referring to assimilate as a descriptive concept, it implies not only the extent and nature of its purely empirical interest, but also the involvement of moral and policy questions, which are often blurred when dealing with the subject.

Again Assimilation refers to a variable, not an attribute. Much of the disagreement surrounding the study of assimilation is due to the failure to see it as a process and to examine the effects of various degrees. When treated as a variable, assimilation can range from the smallest beginnings of interaction and cultural exchange to the thorough fusion of the groups. It can thus be seen as a process in which people of diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds come to interact in the life of the larger community. The new Encyclopaedia Britannica, Vol. 12, 15<sup>th</sup> edn, defined it as acculturation— a phenomenon that results when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups. The western theories of Anglo-conformity and melting pot, subscribed to this definition of acculturation. However, Glazer and Moynihan (1970) emerged as strong critics of these theories, pointing out that ethnic minority cultures were not being assimilated and that language and cultures are lost in the first and second generations and while the ethnic minority group maintains an identity, it is a changed identity.

Assimilation can best be defined as a multi-dimensional process. The various aspects of the process are propelled by different sets of

causes and also respond to various circumstances. Various factors—historical, demographic, economic and political influence assimilation. They can be as follows: (1) minority relative to the total population; (2) return to homeland difficult and infrequent; (3) longtime residents; (4) share one of majority religions; (5) same race as majority or dominant group; (6) entered voluntarily, (7) come from a society culturally similar to the receiving society; (8) repelled by political and economic developments in homeland; (9) experience little discrimination; (10) resident in an open class society; (11) targets of little prejudice; (12) living in an expanding economy; (13) little shared memory of former statehood; (14) full legal and political status as citizens. The overall factor is, however, a congenial social climate. These factors allow migrants and/or minority groups to assimilate imperceptibly into the host society.

### ETHNIC CONFLICTS

In few instances, however, is assimilation complete. Traces of ethnic variation can persist even after several generations of extensive social and physical contact. Ethnic identities can be preserved and reaffirmed even where extensive assimilation has taken place. Contact and acculturation raise hopes, but numerous barriers still block ethnic minority groups, who were one-time migrants from entrance into the full range of opportunities in the larger society. This leads to a reaffirming of their distinctiveness and promoting cultural renewal; revivalism is the keyword here. This in turn generates ethnic movements leading to ethnic conflicts.

An ethnic group movement becomes the instrument for opposing the status inconsistency created by the rejection of the dominant group. The pursuit of economic and political interests by means of ethnic associations become likely, when members of the ethnic group are not fully accepted into the dominant society despite occupational, educational, or other attainments generally rewarded in that society. Interest based ethnic movements often occur when strong acculturative, integrative and even amalgamative forces have raised hopes for rapid sta-

tus improvement. The hopes and expectations however soar above the more changing reality. Thus, group awareness is often increased and not lowered by the reduction of discrimination, by the movement that brought about the reduction and by the increase in the sense of shared relative deprivation caused by the growing gap between hopes and actual deprivation.

Ethnic conflicts are thus results of ethnic diversity. These conflicts are generally struggles for recognition of higher economic and social status and political power by the ethnic minorities. In spite of long residence, and acculturation, the feeling of discrimination is strong enough to lead to a struggle for the assertion of their rights. The fear of losing linguistic and cultural identity generates movements for the preservation of language and culture.

Ethnic conflicts are also related to economic opportunities, vis-a-vis migrants. The migrants take advantage of economic opportunities in a developing economy. These lead to immigrant nativist movements, which are the consequence of labour migrants into established societies. The immigrants with limited economic resources occupy positions in the occupational hierarchies and experience social discrimination.<sup>11</sup> Sometimes, they are also the victims of anti-foreigner responses.

Ethnic movements are also motivated and perpetuated due to political intervention. Political parties not only keep alive these ethnic differences but also use them in their game for political power. The ethnic minority groups, who are in the fray for recognition of their rights often become victims and are exploited in their struggle. This leads to a feeling of insecurity, deprivation and frustration, in turn keeping alive the movement for ethnic identity.

### THE PROBLEM

South Asia, for a long time has been a scene for movements of the people from one part to another. In this context, the movements of the Nepalis into the neighbouring areas have assumed tremendous historical, sociological, political and demographic importance. The migration

of these people since the turn of the century, west to east, through Sikkim, Bhutan, Assam and as far as Myanmar etc. began to have serious socio-political ramifications.

Assam, the pivotal state of North-east India, being strategically located at the base of the Eastern Himalayas, lies on the path of various migratory groups, who at some time or the other in the region's history made it their home. This is what gave Assam its pluralistic, multi-cultural ethos. These migrant groups assimilated into the host society to become a part of the distinct Asamiya identity. The society also accepted them and the merger was almost complete. The Nepalis, who migrated in the pre-colonial times merged almost imperceptibly into the Asamiya society.

Large scale Nepali migration into the North-east Assam began only with the colonial intervention in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The colonial vision of Assam as the last land frontier of British India turned into a reality, when the economic transformations that began with tea plantations set off economic forces that gave an impetus to immigration. The active policies pursued by the colonialists opened up the valley to the Nepali Highlanders. The colonials required a pliant labour force for all and sundry work from clearing forests to lumbering to domestic help, which was effectively provided by the versatile Nepali. They thus moved from the hills to the valleys and slowly infiltrated into the urban areas. In the process, they assimilated into the Asamiya society, almost completely and contributed largely to the social, economic and political development of the state. In the post-colonial period also this movement continued aided by Indo-Nepal bilateral relations and attracted by the opportunities of a developing economy in India.

It was however during the 1970s and 80s, in the wake of the Assam movement, a nativist agitation that along with the immigrants of East Bengal origin, the Nepalis too were victimized, labelled as illegal foreigners or infiltrators and their ouster demanded. It did not end with the end of Assam Movement in 1985. The demand was soon taken up by the Bodos in the mid-1990s, who demanding a sovereign Bodo state carved out of the Western districts of Assam perpetrated massacres,



even ethnic cleansing on the non-Bodos to claim majority status in the area. The Nepalis, along with the Santhals living in the area were internally displaced and compelled to live in relief camps or leave their homes.

Today, in the aftermath of the Assam and Bodo movements there is a deep feeling of insecurity and frustration coupled with depression at the hopelessness of the situation, among the migrant Nepalis in Assam. Subsequent to the Assam and the Bodo movements not only did the process of Nepali assimilation receive a severe setback but also led to a re-examination and assertion of the Nepali ethnic identity in Assam for the first time in the colonial period. This has taken the form of an ethnic movement spearheaded by various Nepali organizations to define their position and status both socially and politically. The problem in its fullest magnitude is to trace the growth of the ethnic identity consciousness of the Nepalis in Assam from their migration into Assam to the present day. This forms an important subject of study as the Nepalis, who migrated to Assam since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century had never made any moves to assert themselves and had throughout maintained a submerged identity. As such they had never attracted much attention from either the mass media or the civil society. The study of the Nepalis in Assam objectively would be thus very interesting for the students of social science.

#### SCOPE

The study of an immigrant community, which is also an ethnic minority in the region to which they immigrated is important both to society as well as history. We propose to study the Nepalis in Assam, their migration into the region and its consequences from a socio-historical perspective. Although the Nepali migration with serious ramifications took place only in the colonial context, Nepal's relations with India date back to the early time of Buddhism and Ashoka. Assam-Nepal relations can also be dated to the 8<sup>th</sup> century A. D. As such a look into Nepal's own history from the ancient period to the modern period would provide a strong basis for our study of the community in Assam. It

would also be necessary to look into the patterns of migration in Nepal, as well as the colonial and post-colonial migration to India / Assam, the trends and causes to understand the present status of the Nepalis in Assam. The study will primarily focus on the Nepalis in Assam, both in Upper Assam as well as in Lower Assam.

It will be erroneous to suggest that this provides a total picture of the Nepalis in Assam. This is only a pioneering effort in this field. Perhaps, we would need a large number of individual studies of the Nepali communities living across the North-east and Assam and some comparative research before we can hope to arrive anywhere close to a truly definite picture of the present status of the Nepalis as a significant minority community in the larger tribal milieu of Assam. Moreover, the time taken to complete the study was limited and the conclusion arrived at had to take that time constraint into considerations.

Since this is a pioneering work and as not much work has been done on the Nepalis in Assam, we hope that this study will open up avenues and scope for further research on the community.

#### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Writings on the Nepalis in Assam are very few and far between. Srikant Dutt's Migration and Development: The Nepalese in North East, EPW, Vol. XVI; 24, 13 June (1981) was perhaps one of the earliest writings on the community in Assam. He was followed by A. C. Sinha in 1982 and in 1990.<sup>12</sup> But these writings were not very much accessible to readers. Yet, they remain one of the pioneering works on the Nepalese in Assam. Sumanraj Timsina's work (1992) *Nepali Community in India*,<sup>13</sup> devotes some pages on the North-Eastern Nepalis, but his main objective was to trace the evolution of the Gorkhaland movement in West Bengal. Leo Rose's, *The Nepali ethnic community in the North East of the sub-continent*,<sup>14</sup> is an important work, which traces the growth of the Nepalis as an ethnic community in the North-east.

Besides these, D. R. Regmi's works, *Ancient Nepal and Modern Nepal*, Vol. I, refers to Assam's relations with Nepal. Assamese histo-

rian Rai Kanaklal Barua Bahadur's *Early History of Kamrupa* mentions the early matrimonial alliances between Assam and Nepal. Maheswar Neog's (ed.) *Studies in the Early History of Assam*, a collection of articles by different authors, namely Dr. Hutton<sup>15</sup> and Hamilton<sup>16</sup>, including K. L. Barua, also refers to early relations of Nepal and Assam. These works however, contain only fragmentary accounts. But since the pre-colonial information on the Nepalis is scarce, they serve as valuable source materials.

Two Accounts written by colonial officers, one *Nepal* by Lieut. Colonel Terence Keyes, C.S.I., C.M.G., C.I.E., written from Kathmandu in 1928<sup>17</sup> and another one, *Memorandum on Nepal (Part I)* and *Who's Who in Nepal (Part II)* by Lieut. Colonel C.T. Daukes, C.I.E., 1933<sup>18</sup>, make references to Nepali migration following the Treaty of Sagauli in 1816. These works although a history of the Gorkha rule and Nepal's relations with the EIC can be used in combination with other sources in the study of the Nepalis in Assam.

Nepali writers in Assam, though very few have made considerable contributions towards the development of their history. But these writings are either in Nepali or Assamese or Assamese translations of Nepali works. Yet, we cannot ignore the intrinsic merit of these works in the reconstruction of their history. *Itihasar Adharat Asomor Nepali*, written by Shyamraj Jaisi and translated by Agnibahadur Chetri, is an important historical writing up to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, tracing the growth of the community from its early days. Man Bahadur Chetri's work<sup>19</sup> published by the Assam Sahitya Sabha (1983) is an account on significant aspects of the society and cultural development of the Nepalis in Assam. Rudraman Thapa's work based on his Ph.D. Thesis, traces the growth of political consciousness among the Nepalis in Assam. Besides, there are a number of articles and books written by Nepali authors, published as well as unpublished, which gives an insight on the community in Assam. Purushottom Bhandari's *Role of the Nepalis in the Freedom Movement*, deals, as the title suggests, with the Nepali contribution to the Freedom Movement in Assam. These works are however, not accessible to all readers and therein lies their drawback.

We are yet to see a comprehensive work on the Nepalis in Assam.

Monirum Hussain's *The Assam Movement - Class, Ideology and Identity*, 1993, based on his Ph. D. Thesis focuses on the Assam Movement as an identity crisis that the Assamese faced in their traditional homeland in the wake of continuous illegal immigration not only from Bangladesh but also from Nepal. The status of the Nepalis as 'unwanted foreigners' is examined, while the study comprehends empirically the extent of this identity crisis syndrome. Two other recent publications, H.K. Barpujari's *North-East India : Problems, Policies and Prospects* (1998) and Sanjib Barua's, *India against Itself* (2001), have discussed at length the problems faced by the Nepalis in the wake of the Assam and Bodo movements against the backdrop of the larger North-Eastern context. However, a significant contribution comes from Amalendu Guha's *Planter Raj to Swaraj...* which devotes certain pages to the Nepali problems in the colonial period and their participation in the freedom struggle. Guha has also written a few articles in magazines and journals, which deal with the Nepalis in Assam.

Various articles, published from time to time in the local and national dailies, both in English and Assamese, supplement the information on the Nepalis in Assam.

We cannot rule out the importance of the internet websites, specially those on issues of Migration, Refugees, Internal Displacement and Human Rights. Few websites like the [www.hrdc.net](http://www.hrdc.net), [www.refugees.org](http://www.refugees.org), [www.idpproject.org](http://www.idpproject.org) and also on *EPW* and *Contemporary South Asia*, supplement information on the Nepalis and their present problems.

#### METHODOLOGY

The study has been conducted by a combination of empirical as well as a library method of study. Archival materials, where available has been used as a connecting link between different aspects. Secondary source materials have been used with caution, the materials have been examined and analysed, evidences weighed and used after a proper interpretation of relevant facts.

Field study featuring direct, qualitative observation of natural situations or settings using mainly the techniques of participant observation or intensive interviewing or both forms an important aspect of the present work. Since writings on the present Nepali situation are scarce, the field has been used to generate primary data. Also in the understanding of their culture-customs, religion, language, extent of assimilation, etc, importance of participant observation and intensive interviewing could not be minimized. For the selection of the areas and respondents, we have used the stratified random sampling. The field work has been carried out in pockets of Nepali dominated areas all over Assam : (i) in and around Guwahati, (ii) in the Darrang district, (iii) in Upper Assam.

The respondents were selected randomly and an effort was made to include people from all classes, professions and age groups (18 onwards), politicians, government officers, teachers, businessmen, students, working women as well as housewives. To get proper information, the questions were open-ended and on various issues relating to their life, culture, assimilation and political aspirations. The respondents were very co-operative and once a rapport was established, they opened up and answered all the questions.

The field study has allowed us a glimpse into the life styles of the Nepalis in different parts of Assam. Even their attitudes to the problems faced by them differed in different areas. From the views of the respondents, we have found out that the people of Upper Assam are comparatively better off than those in the areas of the BAC. The study in Rowta, Bhanu Chowk as well as Udalguri, revealed the distressed situation of the Nepalis in the aftermath of the student and Bodo movements. In such situations, oral sources have to be used carefully to avoid being over sympathetic towards the respondents. This might distort the final reporting. The Nepalis in the Sonitpur district appeared well assimilated and politically conscious. Overall, we noticed that despite the long assimilation, the Nepalis still retained their own traditions and customs and there was a resurgence of the Nepali ethnic identity in an effort to better their position and seek redress for their griev-

ances. It has been found that field study and oral account have proved very effective in the present study of the community.

Reconstructing the history of a community, a minority community and that too for an outsider to the community is not an easy task. More so, as with the growth of ideas on history, there has been a radical change in the technique of writing history. Historical methods as developed, tried to present past events in their correct perspective by the diligent collection of all relevant data, by the critical examination of that data to derive the truth, by the intelligent interpretation of the data to explain its significance, and by the lucid and attractive presentation of the shifted and tested data in order to make history a fascinating tale. The writing of the history of a community, which is not an easy job, requires the reconstruction of the past as nearly as it had really happened. For this, the material has to be used with great care and a number of mental operations have to be performed, for the element of subjectivity is very great in history and a historian has to be constantly on guard, lest he slips into fiction. In reconstructing the history of the 'Nepalis in Assam', similar care had to be adopted. The lack of recorded events and scattered and fragmentary information, hints on the danger of the connecting stream between one event and the other being lost. One thus, has to be extremely careful in handling the available material so as to maintain connectivity and also correctly interpret the events. Another likely danger is to confuse the issues of the 'Nepalis in Assam' with the 'Nepalis of North-east India' -i.e. Shillong, Arunachal Pradesh, Bhutan borders, etc., since they all immigrated around the same time (post 1826) and the region was one till the creation of the separate states (post-independence). Another major problem faced is the overlapping of vital issues like that of 'citizenship' and 'nationality' (Indo-Nepal Treaty 1950), which many Nepalis themselves are confused about. This factor emerges time and again specially when dealing with the present situation and during the field study. The element of subjectivity is also very strong during the fieldwork, where the sympathetic feelings might override proper interpretation of data.

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