

The Cultural Ostracism Of Indian Nepalis And Their Crusade For Identity In The Indian Landscape

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Abstract:

India is a land of diverse cultures, witnessing a massive influx of people from all ages. Many historical events in the past led to the migration of various ethnicities from the neighbouring countries in India. One of the significant events was the 'Anglo-Nepalis war' of 1814 followed by the acquisition of Darjeeling by the British in the year 1835, which led to the massive migration of Nepalis¹ into India. The large-scale influx resulted from the 'British colonial' demand for brave soldiers and plantation workers for tea estates. Later in 1950, the 'open border' concept in the India-Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship, added to the migration history. Since then, the Nepalis have dispersed and become a part of the social structure of Indian society. In the early 19th century, the influx was mainly of the janajatis² (indigenous people) from Nepal and a few groups geographically belonging to the Himalayan areas. The immigrants geographically dispersed themselves in the areas bordering India and Nepal. Their diaspora resulted in a shift in their lifestyle and culture. At present, they are widespread in various parts of India, struggling to create a niche identity for themselves. Though they belong to India, they are not socially recognized as Indian. To an extent, the contribution of Indian-Nepalis to the military is prevalent but what remains unknown is the question of their identity of being 'an Indian'. Therefore, this paper intends to explore the Indian Nepali community's contribution to India, the intercultural exchange, their influence on Indian cuisine and culture, and their fight for acceptance as true Indians in their own nation. Further, by examining the socio-cultural dynamics, the community's migration pattern, and processes of cultural assimilation, this study aims to highlight the community's efforts to overcome marginalisation and assert their identity within the broader Indian landscape.

Keywords: Indian-Nepali, identity, migration, culture, ethnicity.

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I. Introduction: An Insight Into The India-Nepal Political Backdrop

India- Nepal Boundary Analysis, Before India's Independence:

The history of Indian Nepalis and their geographical origin resulted from a series of political factors as Nepal and India's territories seen at present were quite different in the past. There have been progressive cultural tribulations affecting the population of both nations.

Before the defined political boundaries of Nepal and India and before India's independence, the geographical boundaries dividing the two nations already had a few indigenous people residing along the Darjeeling-Sikkim Himalayan range and the Garhwal-Himalayan range. Historically, the picturesque places of the Darjeeling-Sikkim Himalayan range were fragments of three different kingdoms. Darjeeling was within Sikkim, which for three decades was part of Nepal until the Anglo-Nepalese War, 1814–1815, following which one-third of Nepal's present territory had to be 'ceded' to the British (Subba T. , 2018), and Kalimpong, on the other hand, had been part of Bhutan (Malley, 1907) until it was merged with Darjeeling in 1864.

For a brief period, Nepal's territory stretched to encompass 'Sikkim and Darjeeling' in the east and 'Kumaon-Garhwal' in the west (Subba T., 2018). Amidst the shifting of political boundaries, people belonging to either of the countries faced the question of being indigenous. As a result, though most Nepali-speaking people resided in Nepal, some remained in India. One instance of their increased population is due to their existing settlements in the eastern part of Sikkim-Darjeeling and the western part of Kumaon-Garhwal, and another important instance that contributed to the migration history was the British colonizers' need for labor and armed forces.

¹ Referred here to Nepali speaking population

² Mongoloid group of Tibeto-Burman ethnicity in Nepali community eg: Rais, Tamangs, Magars etc.

Formation of Nepal and its location at present:

Nepal lies in the middle range of the Himalayas, and its geographical or political boundaries were not defined until 1742 AD. Only in 1742 AD, under the reign of Prithvi Narayan Shah, did the unification of Nepal take place with Kathmandu as its capital in 1769. Marie Lecomte-Tilouine, senior researcher in the social anthropology of the Himalayan region at CNRS France, in her book 'Hindu Kingship, Ethnic Revival and Maoist Rebellion in Nepal', explains; that during the reign of Emperor Prithvi Narayan Shah and his successor, 'unification or hinduification' of almost sixty smaller kingdoms was done. (Lecomte-Tilouine, 2009).

Nepal politically lies between the two countries: Xizang (Tibet), China to the north, and India, which surrounds it on the east, west, and south. In the west, the *Mahakali* River separates Nepal from India's Pithouragarh district in Uttar Pradesh, while in the east, Nepal shares borders with West Bengal. To the south, it borders Uttar Pradesh and Bihar forming nearly a 1700 Km long border with Nepal's Terai region (Bahak, 1992) (Singh, 2010). Considering Nepal's compact border with India on three sides, migration between the two countries has been historically facilitated, especially after the 1950 India-Nepal Friendship Treaty, which established an open border allowing free movement of people between both nations.

The historical backdrop of migration till India's independence:

The colonial era marked a significant turning point in migration history. Beyond the geographical divide of the Himalayan region, the migration of people across the India-Nepal border has been deeply influenced by historical events. Numerous researchers and scholars have explored the migration of the Nepali-speaking population, highlighting the complex factors that have shaped this movement over time.

Bidhan Golay, lecturer at the Center for Himalayan Studies at North Bengal University, by 1815 three battalions of Gurkha regiments had been established. Following the successful suppression of the Sepoy Mutiny, the supremacy of the Gurkhas was appreciated by the British, and by 1864 British government issued a charter for the Gurkha regiment to acquire land for settlement stations at Dharamshala, Dehradun, Almora, Gorakhpur, Shillong etc. (Golay, 2009). With the growing Nepali-speaking population, in 1870, the Gorkha Recruitment Depot was established in Darjeeling, attracting recruits from both the local region and neighboring Nepal (Golay, 2009). By 1904, it was estimated that approximately 57% of the Indian army's personnel were drawn from Punjab and Nepal. This shows that the Nepali were not only crucial to the British military but also became an integral part of India's socio-political fabric.

According to BC Upreti, the first direct contact between Nepalis and Indians occurred in 1817, when approx. 1000 Indians and Gurkha took part in the Sylhet operation part of the Cuttack Legion. The 'Yandaboo Treaty' of February 24, 1826, between the East India Company and the Burmese King, propelled the migration of Nepalis to northeastern India (Upreti, 2009). Following the treaty, which marked the end of First Anglo-Burmese War, the region saw an influx of Nepali migrants, contributing to the formation of what would later become the Assam Light Infantry (Upreti, 2009).

Saroj Kumar Timalisina, highlights that the Nepali-speaking migration occurred after Gorkha recruitment into the armies of Maharaja Ranjit Singh – the Sikh ruler in the early 19th century (Timalisina, 2022). R. Bhattarai mentions another evidence of migration after Gorkha established rule in Kumaon and Garhwal of present India in 1804 (Bhattarai, 2007) when the first flow of Nepalis started moving to Kumaon, Garhwal, and up to Sutlej, during the same time, Gorkha moved beyond Sikkim towards the east (Bhattarai, 2007).

Raghavendra Prabhat Singh in his book 'Geo-Political Position of Nepal and its impact on Indian Security', explains that the the Anglo – Nepal war (1814 – 1816), ending with the Sugauli Treaty of 1816, curated 'the present India-Nepal border, and this effectively divided Nepali-speaking communities between the two nations (Singh, 2010).

The introduction of tea plantations was another historic event in the years 1840-50s. The British introduced tea in Darjeeling Himalaya and developed their first commercial tea gardens under British Indian rule (Khawas, 2005-06). Darjeeling became famous for its tea garden and sanatorium town as Darjeeling was formed as a sanatorium town for the health recovery of the soldiers and European elites from the harsh tropical climates of the plains. Dr. Campbell was appointed as Darjeeling's superintendent, and 1839-1849 saw a huge increase in the labour population of the hill from some hundred to 10,000. Therefore, labourers were transported from Nepal and nearby areas leading to another pull and push factor for income generation (Golay, 2009). Nepalis migrated to *Mughlan*³, and their numbers continued to grow as they became increasingly involved in the tea and cinchona plantation in Darjeeling (Golay, 2009).

The formal recruitment of Nepali youth in the British military began only after 1885, and the recruitment of Nepali youth into the Indian army started after the Indian independence in 1947 (Timalisina, 2022). Post-independence on the demarcation of India's political boundaries, these Nepali-speaking populations residing in India continued serving the country, though their ancestral origins were in Nepal for many.

³ The land of Mughals, as India was under Mughals for centuries.

Hence, this sums up a few historical pieces of evidence of the Indo-Nepali diaspora in India, where the migration and settlement of Nepalis in India were driven by colonial expansion and subsequent labor needs. AC Sinha, a scholar in anthropology and sociologist, also says that the migration and settlement of Nepalis in India were mainly the results of colonial expansion, as many soldiers who retired from the British Army settled in India. Currently, the settlements are prevalent in the foothills of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, and Nagaland (Subba T., 2002). Today, the Indian Nepali communities are found in the state of Sikkim and the hills of Darjeeling. Further, the Nepali-speaking Indian communities are also prevalent in other parts of India due to migration for better job opportunities.

The unnoticed Identity of Nepalis in India; post-India's independence:

The Indian Nepali who settled in India have a fair share of contributions to their country. The bravery of Gurkhas⁴ is known worldwide. Their recruitment into the Indian Armed Forces and a separate regiment known as 'Gurkha Regiment' has been prevalent for ages, but their recognition as a community goes unnoticed. The status of Indian Nepali considered 'immigrants' is mainly due to the open border between India and Nepal (K, 1968). But the problem with the Nepali diaspora is that they face neglect as part of the Northeast communities of India, even though resembling the mongoloid community of Northeast India.

From 1979-85, the Assam Movement, spearheaded by the AASU (All Assam Students Union) on the foreigner issue, was against the Bangladeshi. Still, Nepalis could not escape their wrath resulting in their large-scale displacement, which also agitated other NE states in India, where Nepalis became principal targets (Chhetry, 2009). There has been mass eviction of Indo-Nepalis people from various parts of Northeast India. In 1967 approximately 8000 Nepalis were expelled from Mizoram (K, 1968); approx. 200 houses were burnt in Nagaland in 1978 and, in 1980, 2000 Nepalis fled to Manipur, followed by mass deportation of Nepalis from Assam in 1979 and Meghalaya in 1987 (Subba T., 2004).

Even after the mass exodus, immigration and cultural impositions, the Indian Nepalis have grown as a community based on their population size in India and have established their institution settlement in India. As per the 2011 census, the population of Nepali-speaking people in India, C-16, has a good amount of Indian Nepalis settled in India (attached Table No 1).

Table No 1: Population by mother tongue (Census Table, 2011)

States	Population
West Bengal	1,155,375
Assam	596,210
Uttrakhand	106,399
Sikkim	382,200
Arunachal Pradesh	95,317
Himachal Pradesh	89,508
Maharashtra	75,683
Meghalaya	54,716
Manipur	63,756
Nagaland	43,481
Mizoram	8,994

Apart from the lingua-franca Nepali language, there are additional speakers of the Mongolian communities. Therefore, it raises the question sought by the authors that this ever-so-prevalent community in India still seeks to gain recognition as part of Indian society and not to be disregarded as foreigners.

II. Ethnic Background; Culture And Tradition

Indian-Nepalis community and 'Nepali' as a lingua-franca:

Nepali, an Indo-Aryan language belonging to the Indo-European family, is believed by linguists to have evolved from Sanskrit (Pokhrel, 2009). *Sanskrit* or Old Indo-Aryan is dated from 1500 BC -500BC, *Prakrit* or Middle Indo-Aryan dated from 500 BC-1000 AD, the 'New Indo-Aryan' languages like Nepali, Hindi, Bengali, and Assamese are dated by linguists to have emerged since 1000 AD (Pokhrel, 2009). The *Khasa* kings of the Karnali region issued the oldest inscription in Nepali. Since then, Nepali has been written in Devnagri script and is believed to have taken shape between the 10th and 13th centuries (Pokhrel, 2009).

However, the 'Nepali-speaking community is a diverse community belonging broadly to two different groups, mainly the 'Caucasoid' and 'Mongoloids' (Subba T., 2004). The Caucasoid belong to an 'Indo-Aryan' race, while the Mongoloids belong to the Mongolian race. Even linguistically, the Caucasoid speak the 'Indo-Aryan Nepali language', while the Mongoloids speak different dialects of the 'Tibeto-Burman language' (Subba

⁴ A fighting group of martial races especially belonging to the Mongoloid community. There are Indian Gurkhas, British Gurkha, Malaya Gurkhas etc.

T. , 2004). Only after Nepal's unification under Prithvi Narayan Shah/ Gorkha kingdom 'Nepali' became a common communication language.

Considering the Nepali population in India, Rajendra P Dhakal has used the word *jati* to denote a community and *Rashtriyata* to indicate their nationality. Therefore, the 'Nepali/Gurkha' *jati* are of 'Indian' *Rashtriyata*. The acceptance of Nepali as a lingua-franca in Sikkim, Darjeeling, and other parts of India by various mongoloid groups like *Magar, Tamang, Murmi, Gurung, Newar, Limbu*, etc. facilitated the development of collective consciousness of these community people (Dhakal, 2009). Therefore, it is essential to mention that an integrated homogenous Nepali community with Nepali as a *lingua franca* emerged in India. In contrast, the Nepali language was a state-imposed national language in Nepal.

Cities like Calcutta, Benaras, Darjeeling, Dehradun, undivided Assam, Bhaksu, and Sikkim contributed to the Nepali language's historical development. Sikkim, in particular, was instrumental in getting Nepali included in the Eight schedules of the Indian constitution in 1992 (Dhakal, 2009). As a result, Nepali has become not only the lingua franca for Nepali in India but also for Nepali-speaking communities worldwide, beyond Nepal.

Struggle to promote Nepali Culture in the wake of 20th Century:

Promoting Nepali culture became important for its recognition, and Benaras had been an initial school providing an intellectual center for the Gorkha's creativity as mentioned by AC Sinha in his book 'Dawn of Democracy in the Eastern Himalayan Kingdoms'. A few literary figures who worked towards uplifting local literary works were; Bhanubhakta Acharya (1814-69), Raghunath Bhatta (1811-51), and Motiram Bhatta (1866-96), and they were closely linked with the pioneering Hindi literary group led by the prominent Hindi poet Bharatendu Harishchandra. Bhanubhakta's *Ramayana* published from Banaras, became a classic of Nepali literature, while Motiram Bhatta was the first to publish the Nepali monthly literary journal *Gorkha Bharat Jeevan*, in 1886.

Bhasha Andolan, the fight for language, continued until Nepali was officially recognized as a native language by Allahabad University in 1911, and Calcutta University in 1918. By 1940, the Nepali publishing industry in Benaras had produced over 30 original textbooks. However, there was a gradual shift in textbook production from Benaras to Darjeeling, reflecting the Transition from Brahmanical literary tradition to a more Western-Oriented modernism, which reshaped the trajectory of Nepali language and education. However, it was on August 20, 1992, the Lok Sabha approved a motion to include Nepali in the eighth schedule of the Indian Constitution. As of 2017, it is estimated that around 40 million people in India speak Nepali.

The 1920s had been the most productive year in promoting Nepali as an educational medium and Scottish University Mission Institute at Kalimpong was the first to implement Nepali language at matriculation level. In 1924, Prasmani Pradhan played a crucial role in persuading the famous '*Macmillan Publishing Company*' to publish Nepali textbooks for school, for the standardisation of the language. The tributing to the standardisation. The triad of Suryavikram Gwawali, Dharanidhar Sharma Koirala and Parasmani Pradhan, known as *SUDHAP*, became driving force behind many developments such as *Nepali Sahitya Sammelan* in 1924 in Darjeeling (Sinha, 2019). They worked hard to standardise Nepali literature, edited influential literary journals like *Chandrika* and *Chandra*, and also authored several textbooks for Nepali-medium schools. The intention was to help and guide the less-educated and economically disadvantaged sections of the community. In 1926, under the *Indian Naturalization Act*, Nepali was recognized as the principal vernacular language of Bengal, and Nepali books were approved for use in the classes of primary schools (Sinha, 2019).

Darjeeling emerged as a vibrant cultural hub for promoting Nepali culture, establishing several significant milestones: It was home to the first Nepali theatre company, the Gorkha National Theatre Company, founded in 1909; the Children Amusement Association (CAA) in 1909; the first literary and library association Kurseong, founded in 1913; the *Nepali Sahitya Sammelan Patrika*, introduced in 1931; and the *Gorkha Dukh Niwarak Sammelan*, the first of its kind non-governmental organisation, founded in 1932.

In the later phase, the 1960s and 1970s is considered the golden era of Nepali music in Himalayan borders. Later, every year on 13th July Bhanubhakta Acharya Jayanti is celebrated and 20th August is celebrated as *Bhasha Diwas* by the Indian-Nepali showcasing their culture through literature and folk songs. In Ranchi, Jharkhand the Ranchi Gorkha Community issued *patrika* ; '*Saino*,' consisting of literary works in Nepali. There must be a few communities scattered in India that try to commemorate the day.

The cultural shift; the lesser-known traditions of Indo-Nepali community:

The Anglo-Nepal War (1814-16) played a significant role in accelerating the recruitment of Gorkhali soldiers, resulting in a cultural shift. The British coloniser had set up their recruitment centres close to the Indo-Nepal border for easy movement of people. The groups targeted for these recruitments were mainly the *Magar, Gurung, Rais, Limbus* and *Tamangs* from central and east Nepal of Mongoloid origin and apart from the military needs, there was a need for labour for forest clearance, road construction, tea- plantations, etc., who belonged to the Caucasoid groups (Subba T. , 2002). Therefore, the Tibeto-Burman and Caucasoid groups suffered a massive

shift in their culture post their movements. Both the communities have their 'own' diverse festivals and rituals but have been unable to retain them due to diaspora.

Costumes:

The 'Indian-Nepalis community' cannot be placed into one whole group. Perceiving 'the Indian Nepali', their costumes are traditionally identified by their colorful traditional cotton cap called *Dhaka topi* and *dawra suruwal* (high neck kurta and pants) worn by men. In contrast, the women wear a typical *chaubandi cholo* and *guniyo* (high-neck blouse and short saree). The men also carry or keep *khukuri* (Gurkha knife) which is/was a weapon for fighting for generations and now is part of their heritage and lineage.

Cuisines:

Food gives a distinctive identity to a community. *Dal-bhat-tarkari-achar* (legume soup-rice-curry-pickle) is a typical food eaten by every Nepali, *Dhenroh* (boiled maize flour) eaten with buttermilk or meat curry is another typical Nepali food. Traditionally there are more than 40 varieties of ethnic fermented foods and beverages, 100 types of non-fermented food, vegetables, pickles, condiments and herbal materials (Arun Kumar Rai, 2005). There are a few not so famous Nepali food like *dheroh*, *chamrey*, *churpi*, *gundruk*, *sinki*, *kinema*, *selroti*, *khalpi*, *sukako masu*, *kwanti*, *khoreng*, *kodo ko jaanr*, *bhaati jaanr* etc. To an extent, commercial Nepali cuisine has had quite an impact on the Indian food market. Almost everyone in India widely loves 'momo', which is prevalent in the streets of Darjeeling, Dharamshala, Delhi, Sikkim, Bengaluru, and nearly every major city in India, comprised majorly of Nepali-speaking people selling them. Similarly, 'Thakali thali' (Nepali Phari Thali) is specially sold in Delhi's Majnu ka Teela; *Laphing* (roll) of Tibetan origin and the instant Wai-Wai noodles have also gained commercial success. In a way, through food, the Indian-Nepalis have connected with India's culture and belongingness. Compared to fermented food (that numbers 20 approx) of southern and western India such as *Idli*, *Dosa*, *Dhokla* etc., there are more than 80 varieties of fermented food and beverages in the Darjeeling hills, Sikkim and NorthEast India, and today, *Kinema* has already entered the patent process of India (Tamang, 2009).

Festivals:

While Nepali, is the lingua-franca, each tribe maintains its unique language, rituals, and festivals. Tibeto-Burman groups tried to retain the culture where they stayed in a bigger group, especially in Sikkim and Darjeeling areas. Each tribe has distinct clothing, jewellery, food, festivals and religion (Buddhist, Animist or Hinduism). For example, 'Tamu Lhosar' of 'Gurungs' and 'Sunam Lhosar' of the 'Tamangs' are the celebration for the new year and based on the Tibetan calendar every year is dedicated to an animal/bird according to the calendar. Similarly, 'Sakela' is important to the 'Kirati Rai' and 'Sunuwars' and is celebrated twice a year as 'Sakela ubhaulti' during Baishakh Poornima and *Sakela Udauli* in *Mangshir* month based on nature worship and shamanistic practice. *Bhumi Pujan* is an important festival dedicated to mother nature by the Magar communities. Each festival of these communities concludes with traditional meals, amongst which 'Selroti' (rice doughnut) is the most essential, and they sing *Dohori geet* (folk song) and dance *sorathi* (a type of folk dance), etc. Today, on a broader scale, the communities' festivals that have survived and are celebrated are *Dashain* (Dussehra) and *Tihar* (Deepawali) because these festivals share similarities with traditional Indian celebrations.

Struggle within the sub-communities:

While struggling to niche an identity, the Indian Nepalis communities considered merging with the nearby communities and projecting themselves with an egalitarian approach in Indian society. Within the Nepali communities, sub-communities belong to the Tibeto-Burman ethnicity, and their cultural palette is diverse and colourful, but scattered in different parts of the Himalayan foothills (Subba T. , 2002). The Tibeto-Burman communities contain a distinct identity that seems to have depleted in India or rather could not survive individually but only under the umbrella of being 'Indian-Nepalis' (Subba T. , 2002).

The Eastern Himalayan areas have been more active in promoting their ethnic rituals, in the wake of the preservation of culture, these communities in other parts of India, such as Ranchi (Ganguly, 2021), Dehradun (Siddiqui, 2014), Assam (Baruah, 2014), Himachal (Shetty, 2016) have also initiated their cultural celebration as a mode of knowledge for the upcoming generations. To an extent, their physical survival overshadowed their linguistic, cultural, and religious survival. Therefore, it became necessary to strengthen their identity at the cost of the original ethnic or caste identities to discover their lost cultural heritages, lost values, rituals, and festivals.

At present, the presence of Indian Nepali students in colleges showcasing their cultural dances, the emergence of Nepali-pop music in the hills, and food festivals of Indo-Nepali cuisines have added to embracing and influencing their ethnic beauty.

III. National Identity Crisis Of Indian Nepali

A person's national identity is frequently determined by facial recognition and stereotypical features. In India, as in many countries, national identity is often influenced by racial perceptions (Subba T. B., 2018). This reliance on physical appearance can lead to challenges for immigration officials, who may struggle to reconcile discrepancies between the facial features of an individual and the identification details in their passport, particularly when the appearance does not align with preconceived notions of nationality.

India, a diverse country, cannot put Indians under defined parameters of "the Indian race", yet somehow we have produced defined standards for that and question those who do not fit this stereotypical look. The large section of hill people, having mongoloid features, do not fit the standard Indian-Gangetic valley appearance. Nepalis in Nepal and India have common family names, speaking the same language and with mongoloid features, so the national identity of Indian Nepalis is subject to multiple perceptions.

The Nepali-speaking community faces this diaspora of identity, as to date, there is the movement of people between borders of both countries either for employment, education or settlement. Nepali-speaking communities, including migrant labourers, go back and forth between their homes in Nepal and their place of work in India (Subba T. , 2003). The crisis comes for the Indian Nepalis, who the Indian citizens and are strongly dedicated to distinguishing themselves from the 'Nepalis of Nepal'. Most Indian Nepalis community recognizes Nepal as a country based on their hearsay stories from their elders and focuses on breaking its connection from Nepal as its country of origin to India as the nation where they have established themselves (Subba T. , 2003).

Since 1992, the Nepali language has been considered one of India's scheduled languages under the VIIIth schedule of the Indian constitution. The language's official status has been confined to the state of Sikkim, Darjeeling and Kalimpong districts of West Bengal. But the census of 2011, shows that such Nepali speaking communities are not confined to these territories; but are also present in significant numbers in Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Himachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram and Uttarakhand (Chanda, 2017).

The Nepali identity movement in India is well known to have evolved into "Nepali/Gorkhali" identity overshadowing their ethnic identities. The Gorkhaland movement for recognizing Indian Nepalis under a separate state is an outcome of such an urge for identity. The genesis of the Gorkhaland crisis has been from language (Mitra, 2021). Gorkhaland territory is mainly comprised of the Nepali-speaking community residing in Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Kurseong and other hilly districts of West Bengal. However, only the "Gorkha" community does not fall under the ambit of Indian Nepalis, and not most of these communities are constricted to these areas. As per the 2011 Census data, there are almost 10 lakh Nepali speakers in Darjeeling and Kalimpong districts combined and another 4 lakhs in the Dooars area (Chanda, 2017). The emergence of growing ethnic consciousness among the Indian Nepalis has led to the Gorkhaland movement being one of the outcomes of such a quest for identity. The Gorkhaland movement's goal is to safeguard and promote the language, culture and distinct identity of the Indian Nepali minority in India (Khosla, 2015). The brewing consciousness of the identity of Indian Nepalis as a community of their own and recognition of their community as part of India has been through decades and continues even today.

According to the 'Encyclopedia of Indian Literature by Sahitya Academy' Volume- II

-Of the Indian Nepalis or Gorkhas, who, Giri felt, are today only a faint shadow of their former glorious self, he says: (Giri, 1988)

"You have become unrecognizable here

Blood in your cheeks has dried up

The light in your eyes is gone

You look like a child who has fallen asleep, sobbing

Like a prisoner tortured long

The ill-fated whose morsels are snatched away

And the house dispossessed

I have come only to see whether you are 'You'

But, you have become unrecognizable"

IV. The Socio-Legal Aspect Of Indian Nepalis

The emergence of common identity as Nepalis or Gorkhas paved the way for the consolidation of the community. In 1917, the Hillmen Association was petitioned for the administrative separation of Darjeeling, in 1928, Akhil Bharatiya Gorkha League (All India Gorkha league) was formed in Dehradun, in 1940s the Communist Party (CPI) organised Gurkha tea workers of Darjeeling hills in West Bengal. In 1933, in Assam, the rights of Nepalis' rights are seen early in the formation of the Grazier association against the atrocities on tax-paying Nepali graziers of Kaziranga (Dhamala, 2009)

When we talk about Indian Nepalis, we cannot ignore the Indo-Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship, 1950. On July 31 1950, India and Nepal signed the treaty of peace and friendship to "strengthen and develop these

ties and to perpetuate peace between the two countries" (Basu, 2021). This treaty mainly deals with the nationals of 'Nepal in India' and the nationals of 'India in Nepal'. Therefore, a 'Nepali-speaking' person born in India under any such provision laid down by Indian Constitution comprises a citizen of India, which is beyond this treaty's purview. But beyond the legal aspects, in the social world, this treaty creates a myth among the majority of Indians that the Indian Nepalis are citizens of Nepal, creating the concept of 'Double Homeland' (Khosla, 2015). Concerning this point, former Chief Minister of Sikkim, Pawan Chamling stated that the Nepali speaking Indians are jumbled with citizens of Nepal due to Indo-Nepal Friendship Treaty 1950, making them refugees on Indian soil (Sarkar, 2014). The TPA, The Britain- India-Nepal- Tripartite agreement, allows India to recruit Nepali into its army directly. By the end of India's independence in 1947, the ten Gurkha regiments were functioning, out of which six remained in India, and four went to Britain. Therefore, the military history and open border peace treaty of 1950 gave freedom for movement.

The All India Gorkha league president submitted a memorandum to the congress high command and Lord Mountbatten on 15 July 1947, stating that the act of 1935 had not recognized the Gurkhas as a community in India and the '1935 act' recognized the rights of every smaller community, but the 3 million Gurkhas in India and Burma were ignored (Dhakal, 2009). Moreover, Indian Nepalis without a province were apprehensive of the protection of their culture and identity

The recognition of the Indian Nepali community comes from a significant unification factor- the "Nepali language", which is still 'an uncertainty of identity' in India. In 1961, the West Bengal government recognized Nepali as an official language, under the Eighth schedule of the Constitution in 1992 (Mitra, 2021). After Sikkim's merger with India in 1975, the state also acknowledged this status. The Sahitya Akademi in New Delhi recognized the Nepali language in 1992 as well. Yet in 1979, Prime Minister Morarji Desai referred to Nepali as a foreign language, a perception that persisted over time. The lack of genuine recognition of the Nepali language became apparent when on May 16, 2017 the West Bengal Government imposed the Bengali language as a compulsory subject for classes 1 to 10 in the state (Ray, 2017). This move seemed to overshadow 'Nepali language' in the districts of Darjeeling and Kalimpong, leading to agitated protests along the lines of the "Gorkhaland" issue.

In a move to include Indian Nepalis under the purview of the people of the state, the West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee in 2011, made Nepali as one of the six "second official" languages of the state but failed to offer as an optional subject in the West Bengal Civil Services Examination (Mitra, 2021)

Coinciding with the National Register of Citizens (NRC) passed in 2017, the Citizenship Amendment Act also raises many questions about the identity of Indian Nepalis. On the face of it, the update on NRC seems to identify the undocumented immigrants in Assam, but for the Indian Nepalis with the identity crisis, this would be another step for them to certify and clarify their identity as Indian citizens (Thapa, 2018). The news report in August 2018 stated that around 1 lakh among 2.5 million of Indian Nepalis were left out under the updated draft in Assam (Karmakar, 2018). These Indian Nepalis felt as if they were paying the price for India's treaty with Nepal after seven decades ago. These Indian Nepalis have been provided with the opportunity to submit the documents supporting their claim as Indian nationals, but they may or may not be included in the final draft if they identify as immigrants of Nepal.

The identity fallacy is age-old and has been faced by Indian Nepalis in every corner of life. Often the top leadership of the Nepali led political party is accused of having links to Nepal Maoists (Chanda, 2017), or even being a Nepali citizen in itself (Three-time MP, Subba not an Indian: CBI, 2009). Gorkha candidates contesting in local elections in Terai regions, such as Naxalbari and Phansidewa in Darjeeling, were also met with slogans urging them to return to Nepal (Thapa, 2018).

The policies and laws of Indian legal systems have not provided any such protection and preservation for Indian Nepalis in India. In 1917, the Hillmen's Association submitted a petition to Edwin Montague, who was the Secretary of State for India at the time, the separate identity for Indian Nepalis was mentioned under the words- "*Darjeeling's inclusion in Bengal was comparatively recent and only because the British were rulers common to both places....Historically, culturally, ethnically, socially, religiously and linguistically there was no affinity whatsoever between Bengal and Darjeeling*" (Biswas, 2017). Since then, there has not been much change in recognition of the same.

V. Situation Analysis

The Indian Nepalis community have had their fair share of contribution to the Indian history, culture, cuisines, and military. Since then, the Indian Nepalis who are citizens of India serving the Indian soil, face a lot of discrimination based on their appearance. This has developed to the extent that the Indian society has an inbuilt racist notion of calling them 'foreigners' or 'Chinese' due to the lack of knowledge of India's geographical and historical context of these Indian Nepalis. Albeit, it's vital to educate the Indian masses on the diverse nature of the Indian Nepalis. Their cultural history is disseminated and losing its reach to the Indian-Nepalis and other Indians. Hence, it's essential to create awareness of their cultural past. As discussed, Nepali is part of one of the constitutional languages as a scheduled language, but the attention it receives is still obscure.

In contemporary times the 'COVID-19' impact and a 'Youtuber's' comment on Northeasters had been a significant turning point to the Northeast and Indian Nepalis over the prejudice and harassment faced by these communities based on race and ethnicity. The changes brought by the outcome of these prejudices have been visible in social media and mainstream media with the call for the inclusion of the 'Ahom Dynasty' as a chapter in the syllabus and the inclusion of Northeast history. In similar lines, the Indian Nepalis' yearn for the including their history and heritage to be involved in the education system. In the Indian education system a variety of glorified histories of Kingship, battles, and freedom struggles have been involved, but there still lies a major loophole in ignorance of the people's history, their sacrifice and contribution to India, which also includes the history of Indian Nepalis. It is suggested by the authors that through inclusive historical education, there could be some contribution to their national identity.

Further, the promotion of Nepali literature through the works of their poets and authors is also crucial and essential for the upliftment of culture. This includes the promotion of Indian Nepalis works among the Indian literary societies. Even though some of the Nepali works have gained recognition such as the poet Bhanubhakta Acharya, whereas Agam Singh Giri, a lesser-known Nepali poet of Indian origin, was awarded the first Bhanu Puraskar in 1979 by the 'Nepali Academy of West Bengal'. Similarly, many Indian-Nepalis poets and authors' literature works remain unknown.

Some movies and TV series are somewhere bringing the stories of the Indian Nepalis and their characters as an Indian, but even then, their representation is meager. As authors, we suggest the Ministry of culture and tourism can take the initiative to document the oral histories, traditional vernacular architecture, traditional medicine, traditional knowledge, folk art, dance, painting crafts, foods etc. so that they can get recognition in India's cultural mapping and their promotions can bring appreciation to the Indian Nepalis community and can also generate a sense of awareness about their culture and history is a positive development.

VI. Conclusion

The plight of the Indian Nepali community within the Indian social fabric underscores a significant issue of identity and acceptance. Despite their historical contributions to India's cultural and military heritage, Indian Nepalis continue to face discrimination and marginalisation. This marginalisation is often exacerbated by their distinct physical features and cultural practices, which set them apart from the mainstream Indian populace. The need for an inclusive approach that recognizes and integrates the history and contributions of Indian Nepalis into the broader Indian narrative is paramount.

One of the critical steps towards achieving this inclusion is through educational reforms. The incorporation of Indian Nepali history and culture into the national curriculum would not only educate the broader public about their contributions but also instil a sense of pride and identity among young Indian Nepalis. The current curriculum, which primarily glorifies the histories of major Indian dynasties and freedom struggles, fails to acknowledge the sacrifices and contributions of the Indian Nepali community. By addressing this gap, we can foster a more inclusive understanding of Indian history that respects and values all its contributors.

Furthermore, promoting Indian Nepali literature and arts is essential for cultural upliftment and recognition. While some Indian Nepali poets and authors have gained recognition, many others remain obscure. Initiatives to bring their works to the forefront of Indian literary societies can play a crucial role in preserving and celebrating their cultural heritage. Additionally, greater representation of Indian Nepalis in media, including movies and TV series, can help normalise their presence and break down stereotypes, fostering greater acceptance and understanding within the larger society.

Finally, the documentation and promotion of Indian Nepali traditional practices, such as oral histories, vernacular architecture, traditional medicine, and folk arts, are vital for cultural preservation. The Ministry of Culture and Tourism can take significant steps in this regard, ensuring that these traditions are recognized and appreciated as part of India's rich cultural tapestry. This recognition not only affirms the rightful place of Indian Nepalis in India but also contributes to a more nuanced and comprehensive cultural mapping of the nation. In conclusion, addressing the cultural ostracism of Indian Nepalis requires a multifaceted approach that includes educational reforms, literary and media representation, and the preservation of traditional practices. By embracing and celebrating the unique cultural identity of Indian Nepalis, India can move towards a more inclusive and equitable society where all its citizens are recognized and valued for their contributions.

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