CHAPTER-I

INTRODUCTION
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INTRODUCTION

Assam, the state of the Indian Union is situated on its north-east part with a total area of 78438 sq. km that shares 2.39% of the total area of the country. It is demarcated by four boundaries with the sovereign Bhutan and states of Arunachal Pradesh to the North; Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Manipur to the East; Mizoram, Tripura and Meghalaya to the South; and the sovereign Bangladesh and the state of the West Bengal to the West. Topographically, it can be divided into three distinct zones, namely the Brahmaputra Valley in the North, the Karbi Anglong and North Cacher in the middle and the Barak Valley in the South. The long and narrow Brahmaputra stretches across the state from east to west. The plain zone is starting from Tinsukia in South Bank and Dhemaji in the North Bank of Brahmaputra in the East to the Goalpara in West covering the vast area of 56194 km.

Climate

Assam has a tropical climate. The monsoon generally starts from mid May and continues up to September. The season of winter begins from mid October and continues up to month of March. The summer days are quite hot while the winter days are sufficiently cool. Humidity is high in summer season but in winter it is less. Annual rainfall in Assam is from 40” to 60” (100-50 cm). Most of the rainfall pours down during the four months from June to September. Strong winds blow from the South-East during February.
Flora and Fauna

Assam is gifted with the abundance of flora and fauna. Sub-tropical evergreen forest are found in the whole region, the total area under forest in Assam was 21.52 lakh hectares, out of which area under forest was 17.58 lakh hecter. Thus, the area under reserve forest constitutes about 22.40 percent of geographical area of Assam.\(^1\) In these forest zones grow enormous number of vegetarian species. Timber, bamboo, cane, grass gum, creeper, and medicinal herbs are such forest products. The soils of the state are suitable for growing cotton, silk, coffee, sugarcane, tea and paddy. Like the flora, the deeply wooded terrain of Assam no less rich in fauna. The most attractive feature of the states forest sector is its colourful wildlife comprising variety of animals, birds and fishes. Some of the species found in the state are either exclusive to her or rare to be seen in any other parts of the country. Among the wild animals that maintain the ecological balance of nature are tiger, elephant, leopard, one horn rhinoceros, sambur, wild buffalo, golden langur monkey, hoolock, gibbon, the pigmy hog, barking deer, beer, porcupine, squirrel, jackal, and golden cat are common and snakes are different types are making their abode in the forest.

The birds of varied kinds such as spotbil, duck, sparrow, hawk, eagle, crane, vulture, cuckoo dove, owls, crow, wood pecker, and bulbul are making their habitat in vast and dense evergreen forest of the region. Further, during the winter season, some migratory birds from the North Asia visit the region.

Study of the people

Assam, the land her people had never been unknown to the outside world. In history and mythologies it is referred to as Pragjyotishpur, Kamrup and so on at different periods of time in distant past. Even during the medieval age when Assam was parcelled out into different petty kingdoms, independent principalities, history has accorded it a high position - basking, as it were, in the name and fame of the Koch, the Ahom, the Kachari, the Chutia, and the Maran-Matak. The modern period that commenced with the advent of the Britishers after the treaty of Yandaboo (1826)\(^2\) empowered to the East India Company to establish British rule over its large terrain. Down the subsequent years till the second decade of the twentieth century AD, the entire territories of the present day Nagaland, Mizoram, Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh were annexed to Assam expanding its geographical boundaries.

These boundaries remained intact till the 1960s and barring Manipur and Tripura, which had never been merged with Assam, the entire north-east India was known as Assam even with a few districts of the present day Bangladesh and West Bengal. That is why, the Assam of yesteryear with such a vast territory is now-a-days invariably referred to as, ‘greater Assam’, ‘undivided Assam’ or the ‘erstwhile Assam’ in different contexts.

However, greater Assam could not remain as such for long and eventually since the 1960s it again fell apart into different states. The process of carving out these states

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\(^2\) By the Treaty of Yandaboo enacted on 24 February, 1826, a part of Assam ruled by the Ahoms, i.e., the Ahom kingdom went into the hands of the East India Company (the British). Yandaboo is a place in Myanmar (Burma) and situated at a distance of 45 miles (72 kms) from Rangoon, the capital of Myanmar.
from the mainland first began with the creation of Nagaland (1963) and then Mizoram (1972), Meghalaya (1972) and Arunachal Pradesh (1972). The capital of erstwhile Assam was also ultimately shifted to Dispur in the Guwahati city in 1975 from Shillong which is now in Meghalaya.

Assam consists of two valleys, the Surma or the Barak Valley besides one hilly region. It has present a total of 27 administrative districts out of which, in the Brahmaputra Valley are Goalpara, Dhubri, Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon, Chirang, Bagha, Udalguri, Barpeta, Nalbari, Kamrup, Kamrup Metro, Darrang, Marigaon, Nagaon, Sonitpur, Golaghat, Jorhat, Lakhimpur, Sibsagar, Dhemaji, Dibrugarh and Tinsukia, in the Barak Valley are Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi and in the Hilly region are only two autonomous districts. - Karbi Anglong and the North Cachar Hills

Nepali nationality comprises of tribes, clans and communities, each with their own customs and traditions. A few of them even have their different languages. Most of the them are Hindus by religion and hence they come within the ambit of Chaturvarna i.e., Brahmons, Kshatriya, Baishya and Sudra. However, they are slowly abandoning some of their harsh rituals and follow only a few traditions in social engagements or even while writing out surname or titles. Identifying oneself with one’s ‘gotra’ (Sub-division of a caste group) rather than one’s caste as such has been the in-thing today. There are Buddhist and Christian Nepalese in substantial number but Muslims are very few. However, all the religious communities or ethnic tribes and clans among the Nepalese have their peculiar identities known as Thar³, i.e., a title to denote the origin of their respective sub-clans or family lineage. No doubt, in spite of having such variegated

originalities, all of them are Nepali or Nepalese. Although, many of them have their own mother tongue, they commonly speak Nepali among themselves. Nepali is one of the major branches of the *Indo-European Language Family*.

The word ‘Nepali’ in general, denotes a nationality as well as a language. To denote the former the word Nepali or Nepalese (*Gorkha* or *Gorkhali*) is used which implies a composite nationality of generic category comprising of a large number of communities, a cluster of endogamous groups belonging mainly to the *Caucasian* (*Aryan*) and the *Mongoloid* stocks of the human races speaking different languages and dialects of the Indo-European as well as the *Sino-Tibetan Language Family*. However, for the bulk of nationality Nepali, a branch of the former Language Family, the mother tongue and for others it is their *lingua-franca* when all is said and done the fact remains that different tribes and clans with varying cultural environment and legacies have come together evolving a composite culture through which runs a common thread of cultural ethos despite diversity in their practices.

That is why, it is a nationality born primarily of a common linguistic base, made more distinct and coherent by a common culture. We may call it the foremost feature of the nationality, both in Nepali and India or even elsewhere in the world. Regional variations notwithstanding, the Nepalese have been unwavering in their efforts to maintain and retain uniformity in their language, literature and culture. They have been living side by side with other indigenous ethnic societies for decades. Nepalese are never averse to embracing the language, culture and literature of host society’s heritage and

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4 Ibid
identity, which distinguishes them from other nationalities with whom they co-exist in peace and harmony.

The total population of Assam as per the Census report of 1991 is 2, 24, 14322, that includes lingo-ethnic groups and communities like the Assamese, Bengali, Bodo, Hindi-speaking, Nepali and others. The Nepalese are in fifth position, they being 349116 in 1971 and 432519 in 1991. The Nepali population in Sonitpur district itself is 75213 in 1971 and 91631 in 1991 respectively.  

Sonitpur

Sonitpur district is situated in the central part of Assam. It comprises of some 5000 sq.km. of variegated landscape along the mighty Brahmaputra up to the picturesque foothills of Arunachal Pradesh, known to legend as Sonitpur. Tezpur is the ancient seat of culture, mythology and romance and is located 181 kms. North East of Guwahati. It is a tea growing area with multiple ethnicities. The underlying warmth, concern for the welfare of every guest and the age old tradition of hospitality pervades the atmosphere. The tea garden community and the other ethnic groups present a poly-cultural spectrum with exotic customs and rites. They celebrate these with dance and song which are at one with the lush green vegetation, the enchanting hills, the purling streams and the surging Brahmaputra.

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5 Census of India Report, 1901-71 & 1991
Tezpur

Tezpur has been always been the cultural centre of the state. It has plenty of urban delights besides being a place of historical significance. Hailed as the city of eternal Romance, Tezpur has been the seat of legendary love of Usha and Anirudha. Agnigarh or the rampart with a ‘Moat’ of fire still preserves the memory of the young lovers. Legend has it that princess Usha, the only daughter of the Demon King Bana was kept in Agnigarh. The ruins are on a hillock facing the Brahmaputra and offer a panoramic view. The ruins of the portals of the Da-Parbatia temple complex are a delight to the archaeologist and the devout. Tezpur and its outskirts offer other equally interesting, fascinating and even challenging places to visit.

There is an imposing stone inscription of the Ahom General Kalia Bhomora Phukar who had planned to build a bridge across the Brahmaputra two centuries ago. His dream has become a reality because the present 3.05 km bridge at the same site is named after that intrepid and imaginative Ahom General. Cole Park, with a pond, also shelters the cultural remains and ruins of the famous Bamuni Hill. Hazara Pukhuri, a 70 acre 19th century tank and the Maha Bhairab temple are the other significant destinations in Tezpur.

There are three sub-divisions like Tezpur, Biswanath Chariali, and Gohpur sub-division. Almost all the sub-divisions, the Nepali population have been densely inhabited. At Gohpur sub-division, the Nepali population areas are Dalhausie, Madhya Chatrang, Jakapura, Bakari Doloni, Dath Kala, Hatibandha, Barjahabari, Dipora, Teleni, Gomeri, Batiamari, Bodui, Rangslal, Behali, Nasbar, Bedeti, Mazgaon, Kauripather, Takaubari, Missamari, Gahigaon, Baranipather and Bramajan. At Biswanath sub-division, the areas like Golia, Panibharal, Tinsuti, Baghmari,
Gelapukhuri, Jamugurhat, Gamaripal, Garpal, Topia, Taubhanga, Rangachakua, Kherani, Balichang and Dhalaiubul. At Tezpur sub-division are only few villages like Lokhra, Charduar, Pachimalie, Solong, Singri and Tehgaon have their habitation.

**Identity**

Traditionally, Nepal has been on the cultural frontiers of India and China. The legend goes that a celebrated ascetic called Ne ‘cherished’ or ‘looked after’ the land known as Nepal (Ne + pal, the country looked after by the ascetic Ne). In Indian tradition Ne was a benevolent patron saint, the guardian of Nepal. According to another tradition, the Bodhisattva Manjusri, coming down from China, drained the Kathmandu Valley by opening the southern rocks and permitting water to flow down to the Indian plains as the river Bagmati. The earliest inhabitants of the land are said to be Kiratas- a loose generic term for numerous tribes, who are claimed to have migrated from Assam and northeast India to Nepal. The Newars, a literate and cultured race, came to Nepal either from India or Tibet several centuries before the Christian era. Their industry, artistry, sculpture, architecture, language, and urbanity were identified as uniquely Nepali.

Another Indian wave of migrants went to Nepal in the form of Licchavi Hindu Rajputs. They introduced the classical Hindu institution of *Varna*. More urban Newars...

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8 Sinha, op. cit., p. 34.
tried to assimilate the new role among themselves and for this reason they are known as *Buddhamargis* (worshippers of the Buddha) and *Shivamargis* (worshippers of the Hindu deity Shiva). Thus, Hinduism and Buddhism co-exist in Nepal. It is a state of affairs epitomized by sacred centres of the Hindu *Pashupati* and the Buddhist *Swayambhunath* temples in *Kathmandu*.\(^9\)

Initially, the Nepalese came as construction workers, tea and mining labourers, and military personnel to fit into the colonial designs of the British. Little did they know then that they would later become an eyesore of the local peoples, tribal or non-tribal. Today, their status in the region is often treated at par with the illegal immigrants. They are sweepingly bracketed as *foreigners*, which is unfortunate, and are forcefully driven out of the region or harassed in the slightest pretext and sometimes even killed. One reason why such incidents occur is the fact that the local peoples are scarcely aware of the history, society, and culture of the Nepalese. Writings on them are very few and far between.

The word “Nepali” is conceptually broader than the word “Nepalese” in the sense that the former represents a culture-linguistics denomination while the latter restricts it meaning to the language and people of Nepal. The use of the suffix “ese” in English refers to, according to *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, the “names of foreign countries and towns meaning (inhabitants or language) of.” Thus, if someone in India

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writes "Nepalese", unless unknowingly, it refers to the language or inhabitant of Nepal, which is probably not the sense in which Dutta, Sinha, and a host of other Nepali writers like Dungel (1983) have used this word. This use is incorrect but perhaps inadvertent.\(^{10}\)

**Table 1.1 Socio-cultural fabric of the Nepalis**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>History</th>
<th>Caste</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Religion</th>
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<td>Gurung</td>
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**Source:** A.C. Sinha and T.B. Subba, *The Nepalis in Northeast India*

The above table indicates, first of all, that Nepalese have castes of Indian origin. They had emigrated to Nepal during the fourteenth century when the Muslim power was on the rise in India.\(^{11}\) They may be better called ‘return migrants rather than ‘immigrants’. The second group consists of those who were there in Nepal at the time of emigration of the first group members there. Of the various castes included in this group, the Limbus is also known to be one of the earliest inhabitants of Darjeeling and Sikkim.

**Linguistic divisions**

The division of Nepalese in caste groups – high, low – is rather crude because there are hierarchical differences within the first two groups and sometimes even within a caste. For instance, the *Bahuns* rank at the top of the ‘caste hierarchy, followed by *Thakuris* and *Chhetries* but within the *Bahuns*, the Upadhyayas rank above the *Jaisis* and only the former can perform priestly functions. In the middle caste group, the *Newars* have their own elaborate caste hierarchy while others have segmentary clan divisions with little or no regard for the principles of purity and pollution.

Racially, the Nepalese are divided into two broad groups, viz., *Caucasoids* and *Mongoloids*. Linguistically, the Caucasoids have no other language except the Indo-Aryan Nepali language, while the Mongoloids have a large number of Tibeto-Burman languages which are mutually unintelligible. Some of these languages like the *Newari* and the *Limbu* have their own scripts and distinct grammatical systems. The simultaneous use of the languages is still found in Nepal but in the Sonitpur district there have almost completely switched over to the Nepali speakers living in a compact area.

\(^{11}\) T.B. Subba, op.cit., p. 57.
With regard to religion, a common misbelief held by many in India and elsewhere is that they are Hindus. Though it is difficult to define who a Hindu is, it is perhaps incorrect to consider all of them to be Hindus. In the strict sense, the actual Hindus are the members of the high and low caste groups only: the Tamangs, Sherpas, Yolmus (or Kagates), and a section of Newars called Buddharamgi Newars are Buddhists while the religion of the Rais, Limbu, Yakha, Magar, and Gurung, may be better called ‘tribal’ or ‘animist’. In their religious system, Brahmin priests, temples, idol-worship, and sacred texts have little or no significance. They have their own priests and own system of propitiating the God or Gods and Goddesses. Their religious beliefs and values are passed on from one generation to another orally, through certain specialists who become so not by learning or by birth but by the will of some supernatural beings. If their religion is called ‘Hindu’ all tribal religions of northeast India or elsewhere should perhaps be called so.

Finally, it is by and large agreed that the Caucasic Hindous speaking the Indo-Aryan Nepali language constitute approximately 20 per cent of the total Nepali population.\textsuperscript{12}

Language plays an important role in generating a sense of identity among different ethnic groups. As is well known, the Nepalese have their own mother tongue i.e., Nepali, which obviously help to develop a sense of distinct Nepalese identity. In view of this, the Nepalese elite felt the need of preserving and developing their language as a measure of maintaining a distinct identity.

\textsuperscript{12} Subba, op.cit., p. 59.
Structure

Nepalese are especially divided into two parts, (i) Indo- Aryan origin and (ii) Tibeto-Mongoloid origin. In Nepali language, those two divisions are known as Dhagadhari (those who wear thread (Janai) on their bodies), and Madwali (those who socially drink wine). Of course, Tanka Bahadur Subba, in his research book, 'Dynamic of a Hill Society', mentions that the Nepalese from their caste perspective are divided into three parts. Firstly, Higher caste Hindu sub-communities, such as Brahmins, Thakuri and Chhetri. Traditionally, they used to wear thread (Janai) on their bodies. Secondly, middle sub-caste communities, such as Newar, Rai, Thapa, Magar, Limbu, Gurung, Bhojel, Tamang, Thami, and Iyama. In the beginning, they were known as Non-Hindu religious people. Thirdly, lower caste sub-communities such as Sonar, Domai, Sarki, and Gaine. Traditionally, they were considered as untouchables in the Nepali society. However, the practice of untouchability has been gradually diminishing in the society. Except Tamang sub-communities, all the sub-communities of the Nepali community are Hindu. Only the Tamang sub-communities have been practicing Buddhism. Here elaborate discussion reflects that helped the process of the formation of communities.

Brahmin The original home of the Nepali Brahmans was in India. During the 12th century, when the Mughal made aggression in India, the Nepali Brahmans migrated to Nepal through Western Himalaya. However, they migrated from the various parts of India considering their immigration; they can be divided into five divisions. Firstly,

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the Nepali Brahmin group known as swarsat group migrated from the bank of river swarasati; Secondly, Kanauj group going from kanouj; Thirdly, Gaud group, coming from Bengal; Fourthly, Maithila group migrated from Mithila; and Fifthly, Utkal group, migrated from Orissya to Nepal. However, with the passage of time, such divisions have been disappeared; only purbeli (Eastern) and pachhime (Western) Nepali Brahmins are existed.

Whereas they inhabit, they play the role of elite and dominant class in the society. Besides, they act as Puruhit (clergy) and perform all the religious ceremonies. In Assam, the practice of the Nepali Brahmins cannot be ignored.

**Thakuri** The word comes from the word Thakur. Thakur is a royal status. The persons, who were skilled in the field of social and political matter, were appointed in the post of Thakur. Specially, the *Khas* and the *Rajput* dynasty people were appointed in the post of Thakur in Nepal and subsequently, their children were considered as *Thakuri* in the sub-group.\(^{15}\) It is said that like the Nepali Brahmans, if the *Thakuri* people led a conjugal life, then they can wear thread (*Janai*) on their bodies. However, in the surveyed villages, Thakuri people are not found.

**Chhetri** The word ‘Chhetri’ means the warrior nation of the country. It is believed that Chhetri degrades from the Nepali Brahmin sub-groups. In this respect, the origin of the Nepali sub-group has three probable sources.

Accordingly, a Nepali Brahmin entered into a matrimonial alliance with a hill community woman belonging to Magar and Gurung sub-groups. Their offspring’s were

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\(^{15}\) Thapa, op.cit., p. 2.
known as Chhetri. Secondly, as a result of the process of sanskritization, the hilly sub-groups converted to Hinduism included as Chhetri sub-groups and thirdly, the successors of the kshatriya and Rajput dynasty deployed in the military department in Nepal. These people converted to the warrior groups, consequently known as Chhetri sub-groups. There is tradition of wearing thread (Janai) in their bodies like the Nepali Brahmins and the Thakuries. Besides it, there is resemblance in social, customs, traditions, and rites among the Brahmins, Thakuri and the Chhetris'. Some of the titles of them are such as — Chhetri, Adhikari, Basnet, Burathoki, Karki, Bahara, Gharati, Khadka, Rana, Thapa, and Rawi.

**Newar** The Newars emerged out as a branch of the Nepali communities as a result of the mixed up with the Buddhism. There are both Hindu and Buddhist sub-groups among the Newars but Hinduism had held in dominant position in the last two centuries. Besides, Nepali language, they have own dialect called Dewan. The Newars do not wear thread (Janai) on their bodies. Though the Newars belonged to both Hinduism and Buddhism, Hinduism is the main religion of the Newars. Some of the titles of them are such as— Newar, Shrestha, Pradhan, Joshi, Maske, Amatya, Bhadel and Tilpunge. Except Amatya, Bhadel and Tilpunge, all other titles are found in Assam.

**Magar** The Mogors were said to be the Buddhist. But mention may be made that during the Mughal invasion in India in 12th century, the Indo-Aryan people migrated to Nepal. As a result of the process of Sanskritization, the Mogor and the Gurung

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16 Subba, op.cit., p. 33.
17 Thapa, op.cit., p. 4.
converted to Hinduism.\textsuperscript{19} The Mogor for instance, and to a less extent the Gurungs. Rais, Limbo have been ‘Sanskritized’ to a considerable extent.\textsuperscript{20} It is supposed that the greater proportion of the original Chhetris were the progeny of Brahmins and Rajputs with Mogor woman.

**Gurung** The other name of Tibeto-Mongoloid people is known as Gurung. Like Mogors, the Gurungs were also Buddhist earlier, converted to Hinduism as an impact of the Brahmins. There is enough ethnological affinity between the Mogors and the Gurungs. In spite of that the Gurungs sub-groups have their own Dewan (Dialect) known as Gurungkura.\textsuperscript{21} The Gurungs own dialect “Gurungkura” have been vanishing from the annals of history.

**Rai** The meaning of the Rai is the chiefs, or status and the titles. There is a religious tradition that there exists the habit of worshipping to the local Gods and Goddess. Earlier, they accepted neither Buddhism nor Hinduism, but influenced by both of the religions. At last, on historical ground, the Rais were converted to Hinduism.\textsuperscript{22} Like **Tibeto - Mongoloid** sub group; the Rais have their own Dewan (dialect).

**Limbu** The word Limbu comprises \textit{Li} + \textit{Abuwan}.\textsuperscript{23} \textit{“Li”} means bow- arrow and \textit{Abuwan} means winner man using this weapon. There is a belief that the people winning victory using this weapons and became the owner of the land property are known as Limbu. Most of the Limbu people entitled themselves as Subba. Today, in

\textsuperscript{19} Thapa, op.cit., p. 5.
\textsuperscript{20} Leo & Rose, op.cit., p. 8.
\textsuperscript{21} Thapa, op.cit., p. 5
\textsuperscript{22} Thapa, op.cit., p. 6
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid.,P. 6.
general, Nepali is the mother tongue of the Subbas. Like other Tibeto-Mongoloid origin, the Subbas were the animists used to worship plants, flora and fauna and stone. Now, Hinduism is the main religion of the people of Limbu.

**Tamang** According to ancient traditional folklore, the Tamangs were said to be the successors of the God ‘Siva.’ Other traditions have asserted that the Tamangs are the supporters of the Tibetan king Trong Tsen Gampo. According to a source, ‘TA’ means horse and ‘MANG’ means warrior or traders. That means the people who would fight riding horse or execute trade with others are said to be the Tamang sub-group.  

**Bhujel** There is no authentic source about the history of the Bhujel. The Bhujels are said to be the Non-Aryan origin and known to be khawas and Gharti in the Nepali communities. The social activities and the religious rites are mixed one and we do not have any written materials/documents about their own dialect. In fact, they are Hindu in religion and also known as Dolavari.

**Sunuwars** The Sunuwars are that branch of the greater Nepali communities to whom we know as the chiefs. The Sunuwar sub-group divided into two parts i.e., twelve classes and ten classes. It may be mentioned that the Jirel got (group) included in the twelve classes were Hindus and the Sirel class included in the ten classes were the Buddhists. However, such religious discriminations are disappeared now.

**Kami, Sarki and Damai** It is mentioned earlier that the caste discrimination in Nepal was created as an impact of the immigration from Nepal. Since then, the various Nepali sub-groups have been created in the basis of their skills. Other some sub-

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24 Ibid., p. 6.
25 Ibid., p. 7.
groups are such as – Kami (Sonari), Sarki (cobbler) and Damai (tailor). Tanka Bahadur Subba has considered them as untouchable castes. These people of sub-groups have cultural resemblance with that of Nepali Brahmins- Chhetri sub-groups. That is why, the Kami, Damai, Sarki sub-groups had their origin in India and they were called the flora and fauna of the high caste Brahmans. There is a tradition that due to their involvement in anti-social activities, they were degraded from higher class Hindus. These sub-groups people are said to be the “fallen people.” The titles of the Kami are such as – Khatia, Gajmer, Sawa, Rasaili, Deapali and Kairala.

Besides these sub-groups mentioned above, there are Jogi, Kumale, Sanyashi, Sherpa, Gaeine/Gayene, Yelmas, Thami and Tharu. They are supposed to be the next sub-groups of the greater Nepali communities. Today, the people of Aryan and Tibetan-Mongoloid (Non-Aryan) sub-groups of the greater Nepali communities have been living throughout Assam as well as in Sonitpur district.

Like any other recognized languages in India, the Nepali language is also an equally advanced and rich. The language traced its origin to Sanskrit (Vedic Sanskrit) for which there is a great deal of similarity with other recognized languages in India. According to Encyclopedia Britannica- “Nepali - the language sometimes called Khaskura, Gurkhali or Parbatiya or Brahmins and Chhetris, is of Sanskrit derivation and has become lingua franca of Nepal but the Mongoloid tribes and Newars have their own languages which belong to Tibeto-Burman groups.”

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26 Ibid., p. 7.
27 Ibid., p. 8.
In fact, the Nepali language is similar to Indian Aryan language and for the preservation and fascination, the people specially, Dehradun and Darjeeling also felt the necessity for its constitutional recognition. The Nepali elite have the conviction that the constitutional recognition of Indian language brings about the preservation of Nepalese national entity. It also helps for the eradication of illiteracy and socio-economic backwardness of the state. Therefore, in the middle of 1950’s, the elite group particularly Ananda Singh Thapa, Bir Singh Bhandari and Narendra Singh Rana of Dehradun Ananda under their joint secretaryship published a Nepali Magazine named “Jagrat Gurkha”. This was the first Nepali magazine, in which the constitutional demands of the Nepali language have been made. Accordingly, the joint secretaries of “Jagrat Gurkha”, on 18th January, 1956, gave a memorandum to the then Hon’ble president of India Dr. Rajendra Prasad. The summary of the memorandum reads:

“Nepali language has been neglected by the Government of free India by not including it to the Indian Constitution. More importantly, it is a gross injustice that the language, spoken by Fifty Lakhs Indian Gurkha citizens, have been labelled as foreign language whereas, the British Indian Government recognized it as one of the languages of the country. Consequently, posterity will be deprived of learning own language through the educational institutions.”

In this respect, RatanLal Brahman in grudge made arguments in Nepali language. The Hon’ble Chairman of the session was compelled to deliver his lectures in

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Nepali language which was converted to Hindi and English. The incidents happened in
the parliamentary session was a far-reaching consequences.  

The Assam Pradesh Gurkha League (APGL), now, it was known as Assam
Gurkha Sammelon from the inception was a great concern to the Language Movement.
They made demand to the Indian Government for the inclusion of the Nepali language in
the constitution. On 28 April, 1968, the Annual Session held at Tirup of undivided
Dibrugarh District, resolved.....

"India is a country inhabited by the people of diverse castes, languages,
religions, numerical strength of etc. since time immemorial. In order to bring about all
round developments the Government India included their languages into the Eight
Schedule of Indian constitution. Similarly, the Nepalese who constitute one of the
communities of the country have been demanding for the inclusion of their language
into the constitution of India. But the Government of India heeds no attention to it so far.
In view of this, this session of the Assam Gurkha Sammelon, urges upon the
Government of India to include Nepali language into the Eight Schedule of the
constitution of India."  

Besides, Assam Gurkha Sammelon (AGS), All Assam Nepali Students Union
(AANSU), Nepali Sahitya Parishad (NSP), Asom Nawadhwani Sangathan (ANS), Assam
Gurkha Sangram Parishad (AGSP), All India Nepali Language Samiti (AINLS), Assam
branch demanded politically to the Indian Government to include the Nepali language to
the Indian constitution.

30 ibid.
31 Narayan Pradhan, Nepali Bhasa Ra Bhasa Manyotako Sangharsha, Hamru Dhwani, September, 2000,
p. 12.
With the passage of time, *All India Bhasa Samiti*, along with Darjeeling, Sikkim, Calcutta, Dehradun, Assam, Meghalaya and Nagaland made protest against Morarji Desai, the Hon’ble Prime minister of India. They made slogan –Morarji Desai Murdabad, Nepali *Bhasa Hamro Pran Ho, Jyan Dinchhieu, Pran Dinchhieu*. (Morarji Desai Murdabad, Nepali language is our life, we sacrifice our life, we sacrifice our life, we must adopt the recognition of our Nepali language).\(^{32}\)

In 1990, Nar Bahadur Bhandari, the chief minister of Sikkim, under his chairmanship established “*Bharatia Nepali Rashtriya Parishad*.” As consequences of this, the Nepali Language Movement gained popularity and the constituent Assembly of various states of India supported and resolved. The West Bengal Constituent Legislative Assembly, on 28\(^{th}\) June 1978, Sikkim Legislative Assembly on 13\(^{rd}\) September 1982 and Himachal Pradesh constituent Legislative Assembly on 13\(^{th}\) September 1991, demanded unanimously for the recognition and inclusion of the Nepali Language in the Eight Schedule of the Indian constitution.

It is stated that the North Bengal University opened its M.A. course in Nepali language. Accordingly, Calcutta, Patna, Gauhati and Dibrugarh Universities gave permission to its colleges to open Nepali as a subject in the Degree courses. Recently Gauhati University has launched M.A. correspondence course in Nepali language.

The Indian Government in 1967 included Sindhi in the Eight of the constitution and forwarded the following statement: - “Since Sindhi is now in Pakistan and Sindhis have no state of their own, it was important to include Sindhi in the constitution to make

\(^{32}\) Thapa, op.cit, p. 96.
its speakers at home as Indians.” This injudicious policy of the Indian Government incorporating Sindhi language in the Eight Schedule of the constitution created widespread reaction. As a result of it, the movement was so acute that that on 7th September 1981, Krishna Subba and Deva Raj Sarma lost their lives when the police of Darjeeling fired against them. The step taken by Dil Kumari Bhandari, Member of Parliament, wife of former Chief Minister Nar Bahadur Bhandari of Sikkim, was noteworthy. Dil Kumari Bhandari committed hunger strike before the Hon’ble chairman of the parliament when parliament member on 19th August 1992, Indrajit Kullar made protest against the recognition of the Nepali language to the Indian constitution.34

It may be mentioned here that with the passage of time, the Non-Nepalese elite group intellectuals supported for the recognition of the Nepali language in the constitution. Deva Prasad Baruah, the former vice- Chancellor of Gauhati University made commendable remarks when he said – ‘Recognition and inclusion of Nepali language into the constitution of India will not detriment the constitution rather, it will add the composite cultures.’

Satendra Narayan Mazumdar, a Bengali writer made a similar statement in this respect. -‘The demand for its (Nepali language) constitutional recognition is a joint democratic demand of the Nepali speaking citizens of India. This recognition will add a new colour to the many splendored unity in diversity that is India. It will open up the new vistas before the development of the Nepali language and literature.’35

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33 Suniti Kumar Chatterjee, Language and Literatures of Modern India.
34 Narayan Pradhan, Nepali Bhasa Ra Bhasa Manyatoko Sangharsha, Hamru Dhwani, September, 2000, p. 12.
However, the movement of the language reached its zenith. At last, the government of India was forced to accept the demand. As a result, the Amendment Bill for the recognition and inclusion of Nepali, Kankani and Manipuri languages in the eight Schedule of the Indian constitution was passed. Thus, after 36 years (1956-1992) prolong struggle of the Greater Nepali communities, their untired efforts bore fruitful.

Like other immigrant community the Nepalese also entered Northeast along with their culture, custom, religion and way of life. After being the inhabitants of this state, due to the influence of the native people some of their old customs, traditions and mode of living have gone under changed. In course of time, they constituted a sizable section of Assam's total population. According to 1991, census, the population of Assam is 2.23 crore,\(^{36}\) although the census has not been divided community wise in the said census, the probable population of Nepalese may be less than 5% of the total population of Assam.

In the contemporary situation, they want to retain their traditions and relative prestige while desiring to improve their social, economic and political status. But in establishing the Nepalese demands—introduction of language in schools, proper employment facilities, security of lives and properties as citizens of India, developing the language, formation of community organization as scheduled caste and schedule tribe, to have a share in the administration, to remove the socio-economic backwardness, to preserve and protect lingo-cultural identity- they do not want conflict. It seems that due to the congenial relationship between the Nepalese and the Assamese communities since ages they focused their interests to flourish their language.

Due to the impact of the modern system influence of traditional system is slow decreasing but there is very little change in the attitude and mentality of the Nepalese community. The endogamous of caste has remained almost the same, although many young men and women are prepared to break through the caste if love marriage demands it. But they are still dependent very largely on their castes for helps at their critical periods of their life, like marriage and death. However, it is interesting to note that they are less caste-oriented regarding the inter-community marriage with different castes of the native community.

Villages are the chief sources of cultures and traditions in Indian societies. In villages, various kinds of cultures religious performances social customs etc are followed in a natural form. Therefore, in order to study traditional cultures, attempt is made to study on village communities. The study of various phenomena and factors of modernization of the Indian rural society is an important task. But particularly Nepalese village life has not been studied seriously in Assam.

As we know identity is a complex social process applicable to ethnic groups and ethnic communities and also to Nepali community. This study on identity of an immigrant group i.e., the Nepalese selected for the purpose has been from the Nepalese community residing in Assam. Efforts have been made to provide direct and authentic information from the respondents in order to arrive at an objective assessment of the study.

In Assam, it is seen that different cultural and linguistic communities are trying to retain their traditions and relative prestige while desiring to improve their social, economic and political status. Therefore, it is indicated that various groups of people are fostering the identity consciousness among the people of their own arena. Hence, the
issues like nationalities, ethnicity and cultural identity have assumed a multidimensional importance in view of the urgent need for economic, cultural, social traits, traditional roles; rituals, language, socio-economic system and social organization process of the community. With the growth of population and a sense of consciousness of their language and identity, they are now able to organize such organization under which they may raise their identity of Assam.

The Gurkhas were recruited as British Royal Soldiers by the Britishers with a view to attack Mons (Burmese) in Assam. Hence, only after the Treaty of Yandaboo (1826), the history of Nepalese of Assam has been recorded. And in 1871, the Government of India deleted the poorbeah element from Assam Regiments and the vacancies occasioned thereby, were filled up by Gurkhas. In course of time, the Nepalese began to make them conscious in the formation of identity through the various organizations.37

Present Trends

The Nepalese of Assam as well as of Sonitpur District have adorned much importance towards identity particularly after independence. Actually, the problem of identity of Nepalese raised its heads very recently in Assam i.e., in mid eighties.38 During the foreign national movement of 1979-1985 headed by the All India Students Union (AISU), and All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP), the various


communities residing in Assam formed different organizations with a view to raise their voice for their identity and cultural preservation.

The aboriginal groups of Assam, such as *Bodo, Moran, Muttuk, Chutia, Lalung, Mishing* and other communities such as *Ahoms, Tea Garden Tribes* and ex-*Tea Garden Labourers*, other *Buddhist* communities formed their respective organizations to unite themselves. The Nepalese in Assam through their political and non-political organizations such as *All Assam Nepali Students Union (AANSU)* 1971, *Assam provincial Gurkha League (APGL) 1945*, *Novadhwani Sangathan* (NS) 1971, *Assam Nepali Sahitya Parishad (ANSP)* 1974, and *Assam Gurkha Sammelon (AGS)* 1966, have a long history for the demand to include Nepali language in the Eighth Schedule in Indian constitution. However, it was the 20th of August 1992, that about ‘one crore Nepali speaking people’39 in India had a sigh of relief that at last, their long felt demand was heard through the 71st Constitutional Amendment to incorporate the Nepali language in the Eighth Schedule of the constitution. Similarly, the indigenous Nepalese residing in Assam have begun to cherish the hope and aspirations that, thereafter, their words would be permitted to appear in various competitive examinations with Nepali as one of the modern language as has been granted to others. But, it appeared to them that the state Government is still not sympathetic towards the adequate opportunities to develop and avail their language. Surprisingly, it was seen that the Assam Service Commission’s advertisement No.8/96 excluded the Nepali language

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from the syllabi of modern language subjects. So, Nepalese are still waiting to draw the sympathy and good will of the Government.

Hence, recently, recognition of Nepali as a national official language likes other languages included in the constitution of India is demanded by the intellectual Nepalese and submitted a ‘memorandum’ to the Union Home Minister, L.K. Advani when he visited Guwahati on 15th September, 1998.

Mentioned may be made that the Nepalese have been pointed out the all round economic backwardness of the community which has been dwelling in Assam. They have been making the state their hearth mad home for hundreds of years. In spite of a plethora of Nepalese having their genesis as well as birth in Assam, they were becoming care-worn burdened by incessant demand of documents proving their origin, by the authorities. These acts of the Government have once again compelled the Nepalese of Assam to feel a sense of injustice and insecurity being done to their community. Therefore, even after the recognition of the Nepali language, the sense of ‘negligence’ and ‘deprivation’ has continued to develop among the elite of this community, as they remained much more backward than the advanced section of the other community.

\[40\] Upadhyaya, op.cit., p. 9.


\[42\] The Assam Tribune, (Dailies), 21st April, 1997.
Migration

The problem of migrants has been one of the prime issues raised thorough a number of movements in north-east. The Nepalese are one such group. Their migration has been taken place throughout South-Asia, not just in the north-east. Migration occurs throughout the world for a number of reasons. When examining the case of Nepalese migration, its several features may be stated. It may be seemed obvious, that the frontier status of the reason must reaffirmed. A contentious argument has been raised concerning just how much land was or is available for settlement in the region. However, the north-east as well as in Assam, particularly its hill area, were until recently sparsely populated and land was ‘open.’ Further, frontier lands on the periphery have on a world scale gradually become subject to penetration and exploitation by a wider economic system- in other words, according to the dictates of world capitalist development. One can argue, however, that at a given level of technology and relatively sparse populations, hill people find the slash-and burn agriculture best suited to the needs. As economic pressures from more developed area (i.e., exploited areas) become ever more acute the peripheral areas were drawn into the process. The rising population and technological levels in hill areas will increasingly found hill terracing more desirable. Added to this fact that from the political strategic point of view as well as from the view of economic exploitation, hill terracing and a commensurate growing population made more sense to centralize patterns of political and economic power.

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44 Ibid.
45 Dutta, Ibid.
Early migrants, particularly peasant settlers, were always spurred on by a particular set of economic motivations. It was not so much the prospect of avariciously exploiting the defenseless indigenous people of the North-East as well as in Assam (the prospect of land is a strong motive) but the fact that migrants were driven to migrate through their own dire poverty and merchants, refugees (driven by political upheavals) or individuals (such as their marriage links), was caused by particular economic factors which the migrants’ local environment offers little hope of economic advancement while a new environment does.\(^{46}\)

The Nepali migrants are in general hill peasant cultivators. The economic crisis forcing Nepali migration has been, briefly increasing fragmentation of land holdings, indebtedness, ecological crisis, through intense cultivation and deforestation rising population without further land to cultivate and chronic deficits in food production in the hill areas of central Nepal.

Ancient Assam was known as Kamrupa or Pragjyotispur. There was no political demarcation between Assam and Nepal. Therefore, there existed geographical congenial atmosphere between the two.

According to Mahabharata, a part on the north of Pragjyotispur was extended up to Bhutan and Nepal. It is believed that the geographical integration and population composition, there was a amiable relation among them. It is mentioned that during the middle age, Rajyamati, daughter of king Harshavardhana (730-750) of Shalstambha dynasty of ancient Assam, was married to Jayadeva, the king of Nepal. It is stated in the Nepali inscription that Jayadeva’ “Wedded, as if she was fortune, Rajyamati possessed by virtues befitting her race, the noble descendant of Bhagadatta’s royal line and

\(^{46}\) Ibid.
daughter of Shri Harsha Deva, Lord of Gauda, Odra, Kalinga, Koshala and other lands, who crushed the heads of hostile kings with the club-like tusks of his rutting elephants." Jayadeva's Nepal inscription was recorded in the year 153 of an era. This era was formally supposed to be Shri Harsha era and the date of the inscription was taken to be 759 A.D. Sylvain Levi has however, pointed out that it was a Tibetan era 11 years, earlier than the Shri Harsha era. The year 153 of this era would therefore correspond to 784 A.D.\textsuperscript{48}

There was homely relation between Nepal and Kamrupa for many years together. According to Shyam Raj Jaishi a tradition still current in Nepal. Machindranatha and Minanatha were two different persons, though at one time or other, both were in Kamarupa. It is believed that there was a long continued drought in Nepal which led to famine. The king was being instructed in dream, came to Michindranatha who was then in Kamrupa and took him to Nepal. The drought then eroded. Machindranatha is still looked upon in Nepal as Saint by both Saktas and Buddhists.\textsuperscript{49}

Prince Brajanath Gohain, son of Bijoy Barmura Gohain and grandson of Ratneswar Tipamin Gohain, a claimant to the throne of Assam requested the British Government of India to make him king of Assam. "Failing in his attempt to obtain the aid of the British Government Brajanath turned his attention to other quarters. He met Raja Rang Bahadur, king of Nepal, at Benaras, who promised to help him to carry out

\textsuperscript{47} Purushottam Bhandari, Freedom Movement And Role of Indian Nepalese 1800-1950, published by Mrs. Rama Bhandari, Jagiroad, 1996, Assam, p. 4.

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid, pp. 111-112.

\textsuperscript{49} Quoted by Shyam Raj Jaishi, pp. 41, 42.
his designs. Brajanath accompanied Rang Bahadur to Nepal where he entered into a stipulation to pay an annual tribute of 3 lakhs of rupees on condition that the Nepal Raja would place him on the throne of Assam. Rang Bahadur procured the orders of the Emperor of China directing the Bhuttias to permit the Nepal army to proceed through their country to Assam. But the death of Rang Bahadur and the outbreak of hostilities between the Nepalese and the British in 1814 put an end to the scheme of Brajanatha.50

Besides this, there was a reciprocal relation in terms of the pilgrimages. The ancient Kamarupa Koch king imported the priests, sculptors and architects and allotted lands for their permanent settlement in Assam. It is believed that the priests of Kamakhya Temple at Guwahati were imported Nepalese Brahmins class. Likewise, during the 14th century, King Jayasthiti Mallah of Nepal invited the renowned Brahmins of India to the Pashupati Temple and provided the facilities for their permanent settlement.51

With the passage of time, these migrated and immigrated Brahmins assimilated with the indigenous society and culture. In this context, Tirthanath Sarma, the former president of Assam Sahitya Sabha (1971-1972), opines, "The Nepalese were in Assam even after Shri Shri Sankaradeva (1449-1569). There were two Nepali Satras at Nowgaon and Sibsagar districts. The name of the founder of the first Satra was Ratikanta. He was a Nepali Brahmin. Hence, the Satra was known as Nepali Satra."

51 Bhandari, op. cit., p. 5.
Today, many people do not know about the Gossain dynasty of the Nepali Satra. Their ancestors were converted to Assamese long before.\textsuperscript{52}

Prof. Jatindranath Goswami was the Secretary for the three consecutive periods. He was also the Vice-President of Assam Sahitya Sabha. He was a descendant of this dynasty. The trend of the migration was insignificant, on the other hand, the process of assimilation was easy and spontaneous, and therefore, the migrated Nepalese assimilated with the Assamese society and culture.

The second phase of the Nepalese migration to Assam began in 1826 after the Treaty of Yandaboo. It is believed that due to the British pre-dominance in India the Gurkhas were encouraged in the British Imperial Army. It may be mentioned that in order to establish British imperialism in India, the Anglo-India and Nepal war was taken place in 1814. Though, the Gurkhas were defeated, but their indomitable will, firm conviction, extreme patriotism and unique sincerity in duty, the Britishers were astonished and influenced. As a result of this, the process of Gurkha recruitment in the Indian military department began. Thus, began the migration of the Nepalese youth from the Himalayan kingdom of Nepal, in the hope of the rehabilitation and to remove economic disparity.

It may be mentioned here that in order to reduce the oppression of the Mons (Burmese), British Commissioner David Scott, formed Assam Light Infantry, consisting of the Gurkhas. In 1824, Scott entered into Assam with this Gurkhas. Later on, it was renamed as Assam Rifles. Influencing by the valor, faith and courage of the Gurkha

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid.
soldiers, the British Government recognized ‘Khukuri’ (National weapon of the Nepalese) as a symbol of Assam Rifles in 1865.53

The British Government encouraged the retired soldiers to live permanently anywhere in India. Consequently, a large number of the ex-retired Nepali soldiers settled permanently in North-East as well as in Assam. Particularly’, in large number the Nepali youths were encouraged to search for their livelihood in the various parts of India. The un congenial environments, socio-economic stagnant and geographical conditions in their homeland were the causes of the migration.

It is mentioned earlier that Nepal surrounded by hilly areas, and for the outward communication, there was no any alternative except to go through the land of India. The internal communication system of Nepal was so remote that to go from eastward to westward, the people had to touch India, while moving from eastward to westward Nepal, a part of the people penetrating Darjeeling for their livelihood. In Darjeeling, the Nepali people did not stay there permanently. For their occupational reasons some of them moved towards north-east as well as in Assam.

As stated before, the economic crisis forcing Nepali migration has been, briefly: increasing fragmentation of land holdings, indebtedness, ecological crisis through intense cultivation and deforestation, rising population without further land to cultivate and chronic deficits in food production in the hill areas of the central Nepal. These pahari (living in the hills) migrants are relatively more skilled hill agriculturists than other hill peoples.54

53 Subba, op. cit., p. 43.

54 Dutta, op. cit., p.74.
There were 1.5 million Nepalese in India in 1970 out of 11.55 million in Nepal. While the total Nepalese outside Nepal might reach almost 2.3 million, the majority of these emigrants have settled in North India comprising a working class whose presence is an accepted part of the landscape.\(^5^5\)

The uncongenial environment, socio-economic stagnant of Nepal as well as Assam geographical conditions are parallel responsible for the Nepali migration to Assam. Mention may be made that towards the last part of the 18\(^{th}\) century and the first part of the 19\(^{th}\) century, a large number of the Assamese people lost their lives for Moamoria rebellion and the Burmese invasion of Assam. Obviously, the population in the Brahmaputra Valley was reduced to a large extent. On the other hand, as soon as Assam went to the hands of the Imperialist British, they encouraged the outsiders to fill up the gaps and yield more revenue from the lands. Again, some of the middle class people of Assam also encouraged the migrants to settle there permanently. It is believed that the two historic incidents caused severe loss in economy of Assam.\(^5^6\)

Gunabhiram Baruah, an educated Assamese intellectual, says that under these circumstances, at least 10,000 migrants could be settled in the Brahmaputra valley. At the same time, the Zamindari people of Assam encouraged the migrants Nepalese so that they could employ these Nepalese as servants.

In 1901, there were 21,347 Nepalese people. In 1971 census report, it raised up to 3, 49,116 Nepalese migrants in Assam. During this period it was increased up to 0.35 to 2.3 percent. According to 1971 census report, the number of Nepalese only in

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\(^5^6\) Dutta, Ibid.
Sonitpur (Darrang) district was 1,02,013 and in undivided Lakhimpur district 1,08,838 Nepalese were there.

The migration of the Nepalese in Assam began after India become free from the colonial power. Indian Government maintained a cultural and geographical relationship with neighboring country Nepal, Bhutan and Sikkim. Specially, India established a close relationship with Nepal so that China could not threat geographical integration and political sovereignty of India. In 1950, the Government of India and Nepal signed Indo-

Nepal Treaty of peace and Friendship. Article 6 and 7 of the said Treaty mention:

**Article 6** Each Government undertake in token of the neighborly relationship between India and Nepal to give to the nationals of the other, in its territory, national treatment with regard to participation of industrial and economic development of such territory and to the grant of concessions and contracts relating to such development.

**Article 7** The Governments of India and Nepal, agree to grant, on a reciprocal basis, to the nationals of one country in the territory of the other the same privileges in the matter of residence, ownership of property, participation of trade and commerce, movements and other privileges of a similar nature.\(^57\)

Interestingly, articles 6 and 7 undoubtedly permitted both the people of Nepal and India, to freely, participation in trade and commerce, in the matter of residence and ownership of property. On the basis of this Indo-Nepal Peace and Friendship Treaty (1950), a large number of the Nepalese people migrated to various states of India including Assam as well as North-East.

The migration of the Nepalese, in Assam as well as north-east said to be stopped, because, *The Assam Gurkha Sammelon* (AGS) and *The All Assam Nepali Students’*

\(^{57}\) Thapa, op.cit., p. 20.
union (AANSU), demanded the state and the central Governments. Their demands were that the Government to stop the free interchanges of both the people i.e, India and Nepal. And the India Government must impose restriction (Restricted Area Permit, RAP) on this free movement, ownership of the property, trade and commerce and other privileges of the similar nature. Accordingly, on 31st July, 1976, India Government imposed the Restricted Area Permit (RAP) effectively on the Nepalese people. Hence, it was necessary to require Restricted Area Permit to the Nepalese people. Of course, on, 19th May, 1995, the central Government stopped Restricted Area Permit, RAP; and there was again opened up the door to the north-east India. Accordingly, the Assam Government, on 24th January, 1996, removed the restriction imposed upon the Nepalese, declared by the Hon’ble High Court, Guwahati. But it does not mean that the people could exercise their franchise and political rights. Only the pilgrimages to Kamakhya Temple were permitted.

Besides, the Joint Secretary of the political department of Assam Government, on 23rd February, 1977, noticed the various district authorities, for restricting employment of Nepali nationals. It reads:

"I am directed to say that the Government of India have for some time past been considering the large influx of Nepali nationals into India and have decided that as a step towards checking this influx of Nepali national should not be employed by the state Governments and by public undertakings. Employment of Nepali nationals by private employers (co-operatives, private farms and individuals) should be discouraged through administrative measures."58

58 Thapa, op.cit., p. 21.
But in spite of the letter, some of the Assamese intellectuals anticipated about the immigration of the Nepalese in Assam. In the words of Dr. H.K. Borpujari, 'The settlement of the Nepalese would not be a problem at all, but for the tenacity with which they held their language, culture and usages although they are in Assam for generations.' Inter-marriage with the Nepalese is a rarity and never fails to refer Nepal as their mother country. Since the first annual conference of the Gurkha League, January 1946, they have been demanding that the Nepalese should be treated as indigenous people of Assam with all safeguards of a minority community. Movement leaders wanted the expulsion of the migrants of the 1966 on the ground of the fecundity of the Nepalese comparatively higher and that in future the fate in Assam will be the same as that of Darjeeling (hitherto partly Sikkimese and partly Bhutanese) where there were few Nepalese, but now gone up to ninety percent of the total population. The immigration of the Nepalese will of course not be a serious concern in case Indo-Nepalese treaty (clause 7) restricting immigration is revised for which negotiations are in progress in between the two governments.  

It definitely discouraged the Nepalese migration in Assam. Generally, the influx of them had been stopped. It is said that a part of the Nepalese living in Assam started moving back to Nepal.

Today, there are only a few of the Nepalese migrants residing in Assam. There is mention about the Nepalese nationals in the *Historic Assam Agreement* with the central Government of India. *The Assam Movement* (1979-1985) was launched in order to expel the foreigners from Assam. Bishnulal Upadhyaya, popularly known as ‘*Assam Gandhi,*’ states that, “the Nepalese would co-operate those movements that want to

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expel the foreigners after coming on 25th March, 1971 and want to become the citizen of Assam."

The Nepalese are fond of living in the jungles, and remote and hill areas. They maintain their own traditions and themselves were involved in the construction and expansion of the Railway lines, roads and canals. In this region, they produce rice, vegetables and milk in abundance and supply to the people of towns and other cities of Assam.

**Significance of the study**

The impact of the modern system, there is very little change in the attitude and mentality of the Nepali community. The endogamous nature of caste has remained almost the same, although many young men and women are prepared to break through the caste if love marriage demands it. However, they are still dependent very largely on their caste for help at critical periods of their life, like marriage and death. It is interesting to note that they are less caste-oriented regarding the inter-community marriage with different castes of the native community.

The process of retention-assimilation is dynamic and reversible. There may be a high degree of assimilation at one time and of retention at another. The process may move in either direction depending upon the contextual situation, some immigrants easily assimilated yet others take a long time or even resist adoption of another's culture and try to retain their own culture at all costs. The mid of the seven decade of the present century, the identity consciousness has emerged. The Nepalese, settled in Assam also express a great deal of Assamese sub-nationalism from time to time. In spite of it, they have more or less preserved their traditional culture, religion and language. In fact, they are maintaining their language and culture. Today, the Nepalese of Assam are not
isolated from the modern world though a section of them still maintain some of their old traditional practices in all spheres of their social and religious life. Again, their social institutions like marriage, family, kinship, and religion have their own traditional characteristics which are different from other ethnic groups of the state.

It is not easy to make a comprehensive and scientific study about all the aspects of this community. Particularly with all limited time and resources it is not easy to make an attempt for a complete study of the Nepalese. Moreover, the process of identity requires much study of diverse immigrants and ethnic communities in different societies. Therefore, this present work is limited to study only the identity formation and the socio-economic condition of this community.

Review of Literature

There are no abundant 'books and literature about the identity of the Nepalese, although there are scattered articles on the topic of migration of the Nepalese by the different social thinkers in Assam. In recent years, such as M. Hussain's 'The Assam Movement: Class, ideology and identity' is ample research book on identity during Assam agitation (1979-1985). Hussain has focused the genuine demand of the Nepalese those who have been residing in Assam since a very long period and already assimilated in the main stream in Assam.

Rudraman Thapa in his Ph.D. thesis (Dibrugarh University, 1994) 'Nepali politics in Assam: A search for identity' puts a genuine idea from which the Nepalese are bound to seek their identity in the vicinity of the Assamese society in Assam. Thapa has tried to explain that many other communities being conscious of their socio-economic backwardness, the Nepalese of Assam have also become organized and articulate in order to establish the community into rightful place. He has explained that
maintenance of distinct identity is necessary for the all round development of the Nepalese in Assam.


Purushottam Bhandari (1996) in his book, ‘Freedom Movement and Role of Indian Nepalese 1800-1950’ has mentioned about the activities of Indian Nepalese. This book distinctly reveals the first entry of the Nepalese into India. He has highlighted that the Nepalese youths were enrolled in the British Army in the name of ‘Gurkha Regiment’ after the popular Sogowelie Treaty of 1816. The book covers the whole history of involvement of civilian and military personnel in the National Congress led by Mahatma Gandhi, the contribution of Nepalese in the historical Dandi March and the Quit India Movement, the joining of Gurkhas in the Indian National Army at Singapore led by Subhas Chandra Bose and lastly the role of the Nepalese in Royal Indian Naval Mutiny of 1946.

Ananda Bormudai in his article ‘A perspective on Integration: Culture of the North-East: Ethnicity and Beyond,’ suggests that cultural integration does not mean small cultural group giving up their distinctive features in favour of merging with the culture of the big neighbours. Such process of integration does not enrich the culture of the big neighbours. Mon Bahadur Chetry’s ‘Asomiya Nepali Samaj Aru Sanskritir Ruprekha’ (1983), is a helpful book to understand about the Nepalese of Assam.

The former president of the Assam Sahitya Sabha, Tirthanath Sarma in his article ‘Asomat Nepali’ mentions about the two Nepalese Satras (Assamese Nepali Temple) of
Assam at Teok and Nogaon, named 'Nepali Satra' which were established by a Nepalese Brahmin, Ratikanta Upadhyaya.

The book 'Assam and the Assamese mind' edited by Nagen Saikia is a good collection of articles about the problems that were faced by the state and the hopes and aspirations of the people of Assam and the causes of their anguish and agony. In the article 'The Social History of Assam through the Ages', Saikia asserts that the history of the social life of Assam is one of change and growth. Regarding the separate linguistic identity, Saikia suggests that while maintaining the separate linguistic identity, we should be able to create a congenial atmosphere so that the people speaking other than Assamese may feel encouraged to accept Assamese as their second mother tongue. The desired change and enrichment of our social life depends very much on such a condition.

Although the North-East region of India is marching to investigate different ethnic identity, in this sense the book 'Nationality, Ethnicity and Cultural Identity in North-East India' edited by B. Pakem, has the collections of good articles regarding ethnicity in various communities. The article entitled 'The problem of ethnic identity- A case study amongst the Moran' has also focused the emerging scenario in the identity formation. It is believed that the Morans generally migrated to Assam at a pre-historic period from a place named Poira near Nepal. The Morans in Assam is an assimilated group within the Assamese community who also preserved their own identity and formed various organizations related with these activities.

Although a number of books and the articles have been published, no research had been done so far the Socio-Economic Development of the Nepalese of Sonitpur District of Assam. The scholar seeks to make a depth study on the Socio-Economic
Development of the Nepalese setting in the area through the field study, interview and interaction with elite group of the district to come up with reliable findings.

Objectives

The present study has been undertaken with the following objectives:

To study the migration and settlement.

To study the social conditions of the Nepalese.

To provide an economic profile of the Nepalese.

To study the culture, tradition, folklore, religions and festivals.

To highlight the Socio-economic change.

To highlight the plight, predicament and causes for their miseries.

Methodology

The Sonitpur District of Assam forms the Universe of the present study. The mighty Brahmaputra River is one of the four largest rivers of the world, flows right through the land and natures a majestic and complex eco-system around it. In the Vedas, the river is called Luhitya, a name which is associated with the legends of Parsuram.

Sonitpur lies in the middle-eastern part of Assam and its geographical area is approximately 5,324 sq. kms. According to 1991 census, the population of Sonitpur was 16, 77,874. It is bounded by the mighty Brahmaputra River and Kaziranga reserves in the South, North-Lakhimpur in the West. The present proposed research work is concerned with the Nepalese. The people has been the socio-economic and political links with the neighboring areas of Dhekiajuli, Sootea, Biswanath Chariali, Golia,
Balipukhuri, Gelapukhuri, Borgang, Mazgaon, Gangmouthan, Bedeti, Hatiamari, Gameri, Kauripather, Dipora, Teleni, Dakhala, Bakari Doloni, Brahmajan, Dalhausie, and Gohpur will be taken as the sample area of study.

Relevance of the study

The present study is an attempt to analysis the identity formation and to study the socio-economic conditions of the Nepalese within the Assamese fold in Assam. The following hypothesis is proposed to carry out:

"The Nepalese of Assam have been trying to build up their own identity."

The requisite significance in the Nepalese identity formation scenario, independent and dependent variables are involved i.e., ‘identity’ is dependent variable and the influence of ‘polity’, ‘religion’ and ‘language’ are the independent variables. With a view to analyze the identity of the Nepalese, the researcher selected such villages where the Nepalese reside in a homogenous way, although the nature and attitude of the Nepalese differ according to their dense and sparse population in their locality in Assam. For this purpose the data has been collected from Nepalese dominated villages within the vicinity of Bakari Doloni Gaon Panchayat under the Pub-Chaiduar Sub-Division of Sonitpur District. For the same, the researcher completed pilot study and met Gaon Budas (village chiefs) and also collected some data from the Bakari Doloni Gaon Panchayat office. Among the villages of Bakari Doloni Gaon Panchayat, the researcher selected the Nepalese dominated village i.e, Dath Kala. The area is located on the verge of Brahmaputra River and an accessible way not far from the National Highway 52. It is 5 (five) km away from the National Highway. The area is bounded on the north by Arunachal Pradesh, on the East by the Lauguti Mishing Gaon, on the South by Brahmaputra River and the West by Kalyanee Devalaya. There were three hundred and
fifty households in Dath Kala village and the total population of the village was one thousand two hundred and sixty. The researcher found four educational institutions i.e., one high school, one M.E. School and one Balika M.E. School and one Primary School and two Hindu Temples, i.e., one Lakshmi Narayan Mandir and Siva Temple. The interview methods were followed to locate the necessary data. The researcher then depended on sampling.

For the selection of households and respondents the stratified random sampling was used. In every social research there is a need for reliable data with a view to reach conclusion. Therefore, in the present study has also gathered the data by two types of techniques of data collection, i.e, primary (field study) and secondary (Government documents, journals, books, articles and research papers). The researcher spent time with the respondents on the occasions of community feasts, and festivals such as 'Sansari Puja', 'Teej', 'Swasthani Puja', 'Fakuwa', (Holi), 'Dasain' (Dashera), 'Tihar' (Dewali) and also participated with them enthusiastically.

A structured interview schedule was used to collect the data which included the questions relating to identity of the Nepalese Community and their socio-economic, political organizations, education, language, religion, polity, background and interest of the respondents. In order to get proper information, the interview schedule both open ended and close ended questions were included. Respondents were interviewed at their residences and the respondents were very co-operative. They understood all the questions asked by. To analyze the gathered data, first of all, the data was tabulated and frequencies and percentages calculated and then percentages made in round figure. After that, some of the variables like religion, polity, language, caste, education, occupation
were presented in table and were cross tabulated with different questions. For the convenience of study, the study has been organized into five chapters.

The first chapter is the study of the origin of the nomenclature ‘Nepali,’ investigated by taking into consideration the view points. Further, it contains the peoples, land, climate, flora fauna, study of people, area of study, significance of study, review of literature, methodology, relevance of the study and plan of study. The causes of the migration of the Nepali are shrouded in mystery. Due to the lack of archival sources and materials remains one has to recourse the tools of oral history. It involves the analysis of the opinion of the people and other governmental documents. The settlement pattern of the Nepalese is not static. They have not been concentrated their habitation in Sonitpur District of Assam. An investigation is taken out to know the reasons for their expansion to other parts of North-East India. Their status, viz-a-viz the dominant class literacy also be analyzed.

The second chapter is proposed to the study the nature of the economic development, population, agriculture, taxes, animal husbandry, industry, education, and communication of the Nepali’s in Sonitpur district as well as Assam during colonial and post-colonial period.

The third chapter proposed to study in detail the nature of the political activities, identity, role in the freedom struggle, All India Gorkha League, Gorkha league, electoral politics, language recognition movement, and role of various socio-political organizations.

The fourth chapter deals with the various aspects of the socio-cultural development, social formation, religious practices, its attachment, assimilation with
other cultures, traditions, customs, rituals, religions and languages. Therefore, the nature of this relationship is explored in this chapter.

The conclusion chapter sums up the major findings of the study. Attempt has been made among the group to reinterpret their religious traditions and in the process certain practices were selected, thus giving birth to invention of new tradition. It would also propose to make certain suggestions to the policy makers regarding the future Socio-Economic, and political development of the Nepalese.