CHAPTER VI

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The political assertion of the people of Nepali origin since the early decades of this century continues to be the most important political problem in Bhutan. Though the people of Nepali origin claim that their migration to Bhutan started since the reign of Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal:1 Nepali migration to Bhutan in an organised manner started after the Duar War of 1864.2 Now the people of Nepali origin form the majority of the population in five southern Dzongkhags (districts) namely: Samchi, Chhukha, Chirang, Geylegphug and Samdrup Jongkhar.3 As per the government statistics, they are estimated to be 25 to 30 percent of the total population of 600,000.4 But, in actuality their population is much more than the government figure.5


5 According to the assessment of the leaders of the people of Nepali origin, they form between 45 and 50 percent of the total population of Bhutan. This estimation is based on interviews conducted by the author with R.B.Basnet on 13 November 1995 at Kathmandu, with Jogen Gazmere on 2 December 1995 and Viswanath Chhetri on 4 December 1995 at Damak and D.N.S. Dhakal on 5 December 1995 at Birtamod - Both Damak and Birtamod are in the Jhapa District of Nepal.
The political resistance and ethnic assertion of the people of Nepali origin have a history of their own. It passed through different stages in a time span of about seventy years. Their ethnic political movement was never a monolithic one. It was rich in its plurality of trends and orientations at different points of time.

The movements of the people of Nepali origin for political and economic rights generally passed through three different stages: (i) initial struggles, the formation of the Bhutan State Congress and its demise in 1969, (ii) the Nepali resistance movement that started after the 1988 census, based on the Bhutan Citizenship Act of 1985, and the promulgation of Driglam Nam Za in 1989 and (iii) the forceful eviction of the people of Nepali origin and the struggle for democracy and human rights under the banner of political parties and human rights groups operating in exile.

Among the various ethnic groups in Bhutan, the people of Nepali origin are more politically conscious and active. According to D.N.S. Dhakal and Christopher Strawn, this is mainly due to two reasons. They write:

The Nepali Bhutanese have been more politically active and conscious for two reasons: first, as a group they are in location, education and culture more closely linked to the world outside Bhutan.... Secondly, of the four main ethnic groups in Bhutan, Nepalis are the most recognizably disenfranchised under the hereditary monarchy.6

As per the Nepali sources, the year 1927 is considered to be the starting point of political activity by the Nepali settlers in Bhutan. During this time the entire southern Bhutan was under the direct administration of the Dorji family. In 1927, the Mandal (village headman in Nepali-dominated southern Bhutan) of Lamidara village in Chirang, Pashupathi Adhikari, who was a Nepali settler, protested against the excessive land tax

rates. He was beaten up, thrown out of the country and his land was confiscated by the
government.7

The British authorities were well aware of the increasing Nepali population in
Bhutan as a potential source of political destabilisation. On 7 December 1931, the
Political Officer in Sikkim Colonel J.L.R. Weir informed the Government of India about
the increasing "Gurkha menace", talking of a population which did not owe allegiance
to the Bhutanese king.8 Basil Gould, the Political Officer in Sikkim, posed the above
problem in more clear terms in 1938. He wrote:

Both in Bhutan and Sikkim a very practical problem in politics is whether
the local races are destined to be overwhelmed by the Nepalese....9

In 1947, two Mandals from Dagana, J.C. Gurung and S.B. Gurung, approached
the Gurkha League in India, for extending help in bringing political change in Bhutan.
As per the instructions given by the Gurkha League they mobilised people under the
banner of Jai Gurkha Solidarity Front to put forward their demands. But their attempts
were foiled by the authorities and the fifteen or so active members were forced to flee
the country.10

The popular struggle in Nepal, which resulted in overthrowing the Rana autocracy
in 1951 politically changed the Nepali community all over the Himalayan region. The
general political awakening among the Nepalis, under these circumstances, reflected in

7 Christopher Strawn, Falling Off the Mountain: A Political History and Analysis
of Bhutan, the Bhutanese Refugees and the Movement in Exile (unpublished
8 A.C. Sinha, Bhutan: Ethnic Identity and National Dilemma (New Delhi, 1991),
p.171.
9 Cited in ibid, pp.171-2.
10 Strawn, n.7, p.49.
the formation of the Sikkim State Congress and the Bhutan State Congress. These organisations emerged with the purpose of fighting for democracy in Sikkim and Bhutan against the backdrop of oppressive monarchies.\(^{11}\)

The Bhutan State Congress (BSC) was formed at Patgaon in Assam in November 1952.\(^{12}\) The people behind the formation of the BSC were D.B.Gurung, Dalmardan Raye, Dal Bahadur Chhetri, Til Bahadur Gurung, Ganesh Prasad Sharma (Parsai), Nandlal Sharma and Damber Singh Sunwar.\(^{13}\) Initially, it was formed as an organisation for redressal of the grievances against the government. Later it included demands like the abolition of the feudal system, democratisation of the administration, granting civil and political rights for all Bhutanese citizens and maintaining closer ties with India.\(^{14}\)

Immediately after the formation of the BSC, its President D.B.Gurung and the General Secretary G.P.Sharma went to Delhi to meet the then Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. In January 1953 Nehru sent a Deputy Minister to the Indo-Bhutan border to take note of the situation.\(^{15}\)

The BSC leaders began recruiting people from Nepal and India for a *Satyagraha*, a non-violent mode of protest. Some time before the proposed *Satyagraha*, Nehru convened a meeting between the leaders of the BSC and the King Jigme Dorji

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11 ibid.


13 Dhaka! and Strawn, n.6, p.136. Also see Strawn, n.7, p.49.


15 Dhaka! and Strawn, n.6, p.138.
Wangchuck. It was reported that in the presence of Nehru, the king agreed to improve the living conditions of Nepalis and initiate democratic reforms in Bhutan. However, the BSC went ahead with its plan for the Satyagraha.\footnote{ibid, p.139. Also see Strawn, n.7, p.51.}

The Party gave much publicity to the Satyagraha scheduled for 22 March 1954. It was proposed to send several successive groups of Satyagrahis from Sarbhang, near the Indian border, to fill the jails in Bhutan. As the Satyagraha was about to begin, the BSC activists were ordered to disperse and return back to India by the authorities. When they refused to obey, the district commissioner of southern Bhutan, J.B.Pradhan gave orders to open fire at the protestors. Around 25 people were killed and many were injured in the firing. Several protestors including the leader of the Satyagraha, Passang Sherpa and Dalmardan Raye were arrested and the rest fled to India. Later, in the trial, Dalmardan Raye, who was a resident of Chirang, was given life imprisonment.\footnote{Dhakal and Strawn, n.6, pp.139-40.}

After the failure of the first Satyagraha, the BSC had tried to organise several other Satyagrahas but none of them received the attention that the first did. Moreover, at the request of the Bhutan Government the Government of India issued an order to the BSC to stop using the Indian territory as a base for its operations.\footnote{Sinha, n.14, p.20.} Later, the Party shifted its headquarters to Siliguri in West Bengal and kept it alive till 1969. When the king offered amnesty to its leaders on the condition that they would not take part in any kind of political activity, D.B.Gurung, D.B. Chhetri and Damber Singh Sunwar accepted and returned back to Bhutan.\footnote{ibid. Also see Dhakal and Strawn, n.6, p.141.}
Throughout its existence, the BSC remained as a Nepali political party on the southern frontier of Bhutan. Many reasons could be identified for the failure of its struggles. Its inability to expand its socio-political base to include people from ethnic groups other than Nepalis, the severity of the dynastic despotism of Wangchucks, the general backwardness of the polity and the Indian security interest to keep the dynastic rule intact for the required political stability in Bhutan were the main reasons which made the attempts of the BSC to change the political system futile.

After the breakdown of the BSC in 1969, the protest against the government continued from outside by Devi Bhakat Lamitare, a Bhutanese of Nepali origin born in Chirang. He claimed himself to be the President of the BSC after its first president D. B. Gurung accepted the general amnesty offered by the King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck. Devi Bhakat Lamitare has authored several books including *Murder of Democracy in Himalayan Kingdom* and *Damkido Bhutan*. He believed that Bhutan constitutes two distinct "nations". He writes:

I once considered Bhutan as a nation. But when I tried to penetrate deeply into Bhotas' mentality, I began to realise that the Bhotas would not like it to survive as one nation. The basis for dividing Bhutan into two nations has not been laid down by Bhutan's Gorkhas but by Bhotas. The partition of Bhutan would be made because of the following reasons; (1) Non-establishment of a true democratic system (2) Continuous oppression of the Gorkha race (3) Humiliation of Gorkhali language by denying it the status of a national language (4) Placing obstructions in the promotion of the 'Sanatan Dharma' of Gorkhas by the Bhotas. (5) Non-existence of 'Vedic' symbols in Bhutan's state emblem. (6) The deliberate policy of Bhotas to weaken continuously the Bhutani Gorkhas economically.20

Due to the lack of supporters, Lamitare could not carry forward his struggle from exile against the Government of Bhutan.

Though the BSC could not succeed in achieving its political demands, the challenge to the political order posed by it in the 1950s had reflected in various reforms and integrationist strategies of the Royal Government of Bhutan.

II

After the failure of the struggles of the BSC in the 1950s Bhutan was relatively free from political activity from any section of the society. As S.D.Muni observes, "since then, the Buddhist Kingdom's political history in terms of democratic evolution has been quiet and peaceful". But this tranquility was affected by political developments which took place both inside and outside Bhutan.

The assassination of Lonchen (Prime Minister) Jigmie Palden Dorji in 1964, the coup d'état against the king that followed and the abortive attempt to kill the present king at his coronation in 1974 give evidence to the contradictions and tensions beneath the placid surface of Bhutanese political life. Apart from these domestic political developments, the integration of Sikkim with India in 1975, the struggle against illegal immigrants in Assam during the late 1970s and early 1980s and the Gorkhaland agitation led by the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) in Darjeeling.


for a Nepali-speaking state in the mid-1980s\textsuperscript{25} influenced to a great extent the evolution of the Bhutanese political system.

In Sikkim, as the Nepali population increased due to migration, the *Lepchas* and *Bhutias*\textsuperscript{26} were marginalised and ultimately stripped off their domination in the socio-political sphere.\textsuperscript{27} Considering the implications of the merger of Sikkim with India\textsuperscript{28} the Bhutanese ruling elite began to anticipate a situation of being marginalised by the Nepalis in their own country. This fear was augmented by the violent assertion of Nepalis in Dajreeling for the creation of a Nepali-speaking state in India.\textsuperscript{29} This perceived threat from Nepalis dominated the government policies of general administration and culture throughout the period after 1975. The strategies adopted by the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) and the Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AGSP) during their struggle against illegal immigration into Assam helped the Bhutanese authorities to evolve similar kinds of measures to deal with the problem of the people of Nepali origin in Bhutan.


\textsuperscript{26} *Bhutias* are people of Tibetan stock who emigrated from Tibet to settle outside their own country.


\textsuperscript{28} The majority of the Nepali population in Sikkim provided the main internal support for the accession of Sikkim into the Indian Union. For details see Leo E. Rose, "The Nepali Ethnic Community in the North-East of the Sub-Continent", *Ethnic Studies Report* (Kandy), vol.12, no.1, January 1994, p.108.

The Bhutan Citizenship Act of 1977, the Bhutanisation programme for the Nepali
Bhutanese government officials and the decentralisation policy of the early 1980s, the
Bhutan Citizenship Act of 1985, the Green Belt proposal, the Sixth Five Year Plan's
plank to preserve and promote the "unique national identity", eviction of foreign workers
and illegal immigrants during 1986-87, the nation-wide census conducted in 1988 based
on the Citizenship Act of 1985 to identify "illegal immigrants", and the incentive scheme
for Drukpa-Nepali intermarriage testify to this.

The Bhutan Citizenship Act of 1977, which was a modified version of the
Nationality Law of Bhutan enacted in 1958, intended to complicate the eligibility of
getting citizenship. The Act attached citizenship to marriage and ownership of property
in Bhutan. This Act was again modified into the Bhutan Citizenship Act of 1985. This
Act made people who were not residents of Bhutan on or before 31 December 1958 be
illegal immigrants. Knowledge of the culture, customs, traditions, national language
(Dzongkha) and the history of Bhutan were made the basic requirements to get citizenship
in Bhutan. The Bhutan Citizenship Act of 1985, actually, limited the possibilities of
obtaining citizenship in Bhutan.

The Marriage Act of 1980 implemented with retrospective effect from 1977, was
designed to strictly control the marriage of Bhutanese citizens to foreigners. As per the
Act, a Bhutanese citizen who marries a non-Bhutanese had to undergo severe penalties.
The penalties included denial of promotion in the civil services beyond grade seven,
denial of agricultural and industrial loans, denial of foreign training and fellowships.

30 For the text of the different Citizenship Acts see Appendices III-IV.
31 Ministry of Home Affairs, The Southern Bhutan Problem: Threat to a Nation's
Survival (Thimphu, May 1993), p.56.
denial of services in the foreign ministry and armed forces and so on.\textsuperscript{32} Since the people of Nepali origin used to find their spouses from across the border, the Marriage Act of 1980 obstructed their upward mobility.

In 1973 and 1978 through the \textit{Tshogdu} (National Assembly) resolutions the administration embarked on a Bhutanisation programme of the state machinery. According to these resolutions, the government officials such as \textit{Mandals} and \textit{Chimis} (members of National Assembly) were required be tutored in \textit{Driglam Nam Za} and were supposed to wear the national dress, which was exclusively the dress of \textit{Ngalongs}, while on official duty and learn \textit{Dzongkha}. But the government could not press for the implementation of these resolutions due to the opposition raised by the \textit{Tshogdu} members from southern Bhutan.\textsuperscript{33}

As per the official version, the decentralisation policy implemented since the early 1980s was aimed at devolving political power down to the grass root level and to increase public participation in developmental activities. The administration of the country is a three-tier system involving the central government agencies, \textit{Dzongkhag} (district) administrations and \textit{Gewong} (block) administration. For administrative purposes, the country is divided into \textit{Dzongkhags} and \textit{Gewongs}. A \textit{Gewong} is further divided into \textit{Gungs} (households).\textsuperscript{34} Though the intention behind the decentralisation policy was to strengthen grass-root decision making, it could not fulfill that task and ultimately ended instead in centralising political power. By late 1980s, the \textit{Mandals} lost

\textsuperscript{32} For the text of the Marriage Act of 1980 see Appendix VI.

\textsuperscript{33} Dhakal and Strawn, n.6, pp.175-6.

\textsuperscript{34} Karma Ura, "Development and Decentralization in Medieval and Modern Bhutan", in Ministry of Foreign Affairs, \textit{Bhutan: A Traditional Order and the Forces of Change, Three Views from Bhutan} (Thimphu, 1993), p.47.
their power and in their places Dzongdags (district administrators) became strengthened. In 1985, the Mandal's term of office was reduced from five to three years and immediately after the elections to the post of Mandal was scrapped and they became appointed by the Dzongdags.35 Through this effective implementation of the policy of "decentralisation", the government wrested the control the Nepalis had over their villages in southern Bhutan.

The Bhutan government even tried to use the emerging environmental consciousness among the developing countries against the Bhutanese of Nepali origin. The Green Belt proposal that originated in 1984 and approved by the Tshogdu during its 69th session held in March 1990 clarifies this. The proposed Green Belt was supposed to be a one kilometer swathe that would run along the Indo-Bhutan border. According to a government report its purpose was to check erosion, and thereby prevent flooding in India and provide a distinct physical border between Bhutan and India. The government could not implement it due to widespread opposition from different quarters. Had it been implemented, around 20-30 percent of the Nepali population would have been displaced.36 Regarding the real objectives behind the Green Belt proposal, Bhakti P. Sharma writes:

The Plan was targeted to achieve a more balanced demographic equation which meant two things: (a) reduce Lhotshampa population to a desired

35 Strawn, n.7, p.70.

percentage anyhow and (b) maintain a physical balance of ethnic mosaic in the country.37

The government's objectives of "preservation and promotion of national identity" and "promotion of national self-reliance" resulted in the large scale expulsion of the non-national workforce from the country. The first to go were Nepali and Indian manual labourers working in the developmental projects.38 Next, Indian advisors and skilled workers were either retired, demoted, or placed on contract service to encourage them to leave.39

The monetary incentive for inter-ethnic marriage (Nu. 10,000/-) between the southern and northern Bhutanese is generally considered as a policy which shows the government's genuine intention towards national integration. But this should be viewed in the context of the Marriage Act of 1980. The Marriage Act of 1980 categorically prohibits the marriage between Bhutanese nationals and non-nationals. The government's support for the Drukpa-Nepali inter-ethnic marriage was intended to create a new group of people who lack Drukpa and Nepali identities.41

The present ethnic crisis became apparent after the census conducted in 1988 based on the Bhutan Citizenship Act of 1985 and the promulgation of Driglam Nam Za

37 Sharma, n.36, p.12.
39 Hindustan Times (New Delhi), 18 April 1989.
40 Jigmi Y. Thinley, "Bhutan: A Kingdom Besieged", in Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.34, p.18.
41 As told by Parasu Nepal of Timai refugee camp, who is from Samdrup Jongkhar Dzongkhag in conversation with the author on 10 December 1995. Also see Rebeka Martensen, "Bhutan - Just Another Ethnic Conflict?", International Movement Against All Forms of Discrimination and Racism (IMADR) Review for Research and Action (Tokyo), no.4, September 1994, p.5.
in 1989. Very soon it acquired gigantic proportions. Regarding the teleology of the present ethnic crisis, D.N.S. Dhakal and Christopher Strawn write:

Although the present crisis started to emerge only recently, the seeds of the problem, particularly with respect to culture and tradition, have really existed since the 1950s, when the presence of a large Nepali population in the South started to occupy a place on the national political agenda, unquestionably because of the Bhutan State Congress uprising. Since then, in the National Assembly, traditionalists have consistently insisted on restricting foreign workers' entry into Bhutan and converting the Nepali Hindus into Buddhism, as well as attempting to ensure that the Nepali population does not grow, either by immigration or marriage to non-nationals. Nevertheless, the traditionalists' sentiment was suppressed by King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck. During King Jigme Singye's time, the traditionalists' attitudes gained prominence. Investigating the restrictive laws passed prior to the outbreak of problems in 1988, the direction that the government was taking appears predictable.42

During King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck's time the condition of the Bhutanese of Nepali origin was much better than it is today. Generally the king was tolerant towards the ethnic groups other than the Ngalongs. But during King Jigme Singye Wangchuck's reign, the situation completely changed. Since the mid-1980s, he promoted the idea of a homogenous Bhutan, dominated by the Ngalong culture and traditions.

By 1985-86, the government introduced a new term Lhotshampa for the people of Nepali ethnicity. According to the government, the term Lhotshampa simply means southern people.43 In the words of Jigmi Y. Thinley:

The introduction of this term not only gave them a standard Bhutanese nomenclature but also implicit in it was the country's acceptance and recognition of the Nepalese as a distinctly different cultural and linguistic unit in the ethnically diverse Bhutanese society. Anyone who referred to the southern people by the earlier terms [Nepalese, paharias, 'rintsam gi

42 Dhakal and Strawn, n.6, pp.188-9.
43 Thinley, n.40, p.14. Also see Shelton U. Kodikara, "Ethnonationalism in South Asia: A Comparative Regional Perspective", in Muni and Baral (eds.), n.36, p.64.
miser' (people of the borderland) was subjected to a fine of Nu 500/- on the spot under an executive circular issued by the Home Ministry.44

Actually, the introduction of the term Lhotshampa was intended to underplay the dynamics of the ethnic consciousness of the Nepalis and to create a distinction between the Bhutanese of Nepali origin and the people of Nepali ethnicity in India and Nepal.

A country-wide census was conducted in 1981 and Citizenship Identity Cards were issued by 1985 to all the citizens in the country.45 The enactment of the Bhutan Citizenship Act of 1985 invalidated the 1981 census and prepared the ground for the controversial 1988 census.

The 1988 census was intended to identify the "illegal immigrants". The year 1958 was selected as the cut-off year in the census, which meant that any person who entered Bhutan after 1958 would be an "illegal immigrant". The 1988 census should be viewed in the context of the eviction of non-nationals from Bhutan during 1986-87 and the Green Belt proposal. Moreover, the census was conducted in an unfair manner. Generally they are tabulated according to the village registers maintained by village headmen. But this time the census teams constituted by the Home Ministry comprised of members belonging to non-Nepali areas and from non-Nepali communities.46

According to the Government of Bhutan, the large influx of Nepali immigrants into southern Bhutan was caused by the easy availability of fertile land which could be illegally occupied and converted into productive cash-crop fields and orchards.47

45 Sharma, n.36, p.12.
46 Muni, n.3, p.148.
government's viewpoint the 1988 census was intended to check the above-mentioned, influx of Nepali immigrants. The government's intention is further elaborated in the following manner:

Unfortunately, the preferential treatment given to the Southern Bhutanese by the Royal Government, and the success of the development process in Bhutan over the past three decades did not succeed in bringing the Lhotshampas into the national mainstream. Instead, it created a situation that threatened the future prosperity and stability of the country. With abundant jobs and economic opportunities, easy availability of fertile land, and free health and educational facilities, vast hordes of Nepali migrants came to perceive Bhutan as an economic haven. For their part, the Lhotshampa population in the southern districts welcomed the prospects of increasing their numbers and changing the demographic balance in the kingdom.... This illegal immigration was facilitated by corrupt local officials and encouraged by the Lhotshampas who were eager not only to increase their demographic size but also to obtain cheap labour for their farms, orange gardens and cardamom plantations. The problem was further compounded by the large numbers of Nepali labourers who were imported for carrying out developmental works but many of whom later settled down in Bhutan.... As a result, very large numbers of Nepali migrants were deliberately and illegally registered as Bhutanese citizens.48

Apparently, the 1988 census was carried out only in southern Bhutan.49 Based on the Bhutan Citizenship Act of 1985, the census teams divided the people into seven (F1-F7) categories. It is believed that "F" actually denotes "foreigner", as northern Bhutanese are not classified in the "F" categories.50 The F1-F7 categories are the following:

- **F1** - Genuine Bhutanese
- **F2** - Returned Migrants (those who had left Bhutan but returned).
- **F3** - Drop-outs (those not available during the time of census).

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48 ibid. Also see Thinley, n.40, pp.22-26.


50 Sharma, n.36, p.13.
F4 - A non-national woman married to a Bhutanese man.

F5 - A non-national man married to a Bhutanese woman.

F6 - Adoption cases (children legally adopted).

F7 - Non-national (migrants and illegal settlers).\(^1\)

In effect, except people who belong to the category F1 (people with 1958 tax receipts who could produce a certificate of origin), F2-F7, regardless of the difference between the categories, were targeted for eviction. Many of the people in the F1 category were also not spared, as they were accused of being "anti-nationals" or relatives of "anti-nationals".\(^2\)

As per some reports about 15,000 Nepalis could not prove that their forefathers had been living in Bhutan before 1958.\(^3\) It is reported that during the 1970s and 1980s alone there were 11,442 cases of recorded marriages with foreigners in southern Bhutan.\(^4\) The government has identified 47,235 acres of illegal landholdings in Samchi district only. According to the information from the government, the above mentioned "illegal landholdings" is more than the total landholdings in Tashigang, the country’s largest Dzongkhag.\(^5\)

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\(^2\) Sharma, n.36, p.13.


\(^5\) Department of Information, n.47, p.3.
The census teams which were carrying out the job put people of the same family in different categories. The calculated attempt of the census teams to put people belonging to the same family into different categories created a group of people to be evicted.

The two Lodoi Tshogde (Royal Advisory Council) members from southern Bhutan, Tek Nath Rizal and B.P. Bhandari presented a petition to the king on 9 April 1988, regarding the way the census was conducted. The petition pinpointed the discriminatory aspects of the Marriage Act of 1980 and the Bhutan Citizenship Act of 1985. They appealed to the king to reconsider the controversial Marriage Act of 1980 and the Bhutan Citizenship Act of 1985. But the petitioners, especially Tek Nath Rizal, was charged with treason and was arrested on 5 June 1988. B.P. Bhandari was spared. Rizal was released three days later after being forced to sign a "confession agreement". After his release, fearing constant surveillance and the possibility of being re-arrested, Rizal left for India and then to Nepal.

The implementation of Driglam Nam Za came into effect on 1 May 1989 all over southern Bhutan. The implementation of Driglam Nam Za was resisted by the people of

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56 Author's interview with a number of refugees confirms this. For example, Prem Bhandari of Sanischare refugee camp, who is from Chirang Dzongkha was put in category F1, his wife and children were put in category F4. Nar Bahadur Rai of Beldangi I refugee camp, who is from Geylegphug Dzongkha and his wife were put in category F1. His son is in category F2. Harka Maya Rai of Timai refugee camp, who is from Geylegphug Dzongkha was put in category F7 and her brother was put in F1. Parasu Nepal of Timai refugee camp, who is from Samdrup Jongkhar Dzongkha was put in F1, his wife in F3 and children in F4. D.B. Adhikari of Khudnabari refugee camp, who is from Geylegphug Dzongkha was put in F1, his wife in F4 and children in F5.

57 For the text of the petition see Appendix VIII.

southern Bhutan in a number of ways. Tek Nath Rizal became the symbol of opposition towards the *Driglam Nam Za*. Inside Bhutan, political opposition against the *Driglam Nam Za* found its way into the educational institutions, like the Sherubtse College at Kanglung, the National Institute of Education (NIE) at Samchi and the Royal Polytechnic Institute at Deothang. By this time Tek Nath Rizal established contacts between the dissidents in Bhutan and the human rights activists in Nepal and formed the Bhutan Support Group in Nepal.\(^5^9\)

The People's Forum for Human Rights, Bhutan (PFHRB) was formed on 7 July 1989 at Kakarivitta in Nepal.\(^6^0\) Tek Nath Rizal became its Chairman. The organisation aimed at bringing about a change in the system of government and institution of human rights and fundamental freedoms. The organisation has demanded fundamental freedoms such as:

1. Right to Culture, Language and Script.
2. Right to Freedom of Religion.
3. Right to Freedom of, (a) Expression, (b) Press, (c) Speech, (d) Trade and occupation.
4. Right to Equality: (a) Before law, (b) Proportionate representation, (c) Opportunity in public employments, (d) Distribution of wealth and development funds.
5. Right to Education.
6. Right against Exploitations.
7. Unconditional release of all the political prisoners.\(^6^1\)

The PFHRB functioned as an umbrella organisation of all the dissidents belonging to different political leanings. The PFHRB has published several booklets. The first

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59 Dhaka and Strawn, n.6, p.208.


booklet titled *Bhutan: We Want Justice* was written by Ratan Gazmere, a lecturer from NIE, Samchi. On 28 October 1989, he was arrested for having prepared this booklet.62

The booklet starts with the following passage:

The moment has come for the Bhutanese Nepalese to cry 'GIVE US FREEDOM'. It is time for us to shout to the power in Thimphu 'Liberty, Equality and Fraternity' and bring down the 'Bastille'. It is time for us to say [to] ourselves Bhutanese Nepalese, unite, we have nothing to lose but gain. The hour has struck for the historic conflict. We the Bhutanese Nepalese have a culture we cherish, a language we speak, a dress we wear, a religion we follow. They are all ours. They are part of our identity. We shall not allow any power to take them away from us. We shall resist, we shall fight to the last man of our race all repressive laws intended to wipe out our racial identity. THIS DOCUMENT IS A PROTEST AND A PROPHECY. A protest to the powers that intend to put shackles on us. A prophecy that a whirlwind of rebellion will shake the hills of Thimphu and bring down the rising towers of terrorist power. We want to tell in unmistakable terms that we shall hold on to our religion, our culture, our language and our land with our 'TEETH'. We shall fight until we win.63

The publications of PFHRB and their circulation in southern Bhutan threatened the legitimacy and credibility of the Royal Government in the minds of the people of southern Bhutan. The government immediately started confronting the movement for human rights and democracy through booklets. The government described the dissident political activity in the following manner:

Anti-national activities were launched in mid-1989 with the publication of seditious literature which were clandestinely circulated in Southern Bhutan. The Royal Government's policy of strengthening national integration through the promotion of a national language and dress and the Kingdom's unique national identity was viciously attacked as a violation


of human rights and a move to destroy the Nepali language and culture.\textsuperscript{64}

The arrest of Ratan Gazmere and the custodial death of Man Bahadur Chhetri, a student of NIE, Samchi on 4 November 1989 created panic among the students and compelled them to leave the country. They were followed by a group of dissident leaders. On 17 November 1989, Tek Nath Rizal with two of his associates, Sushil Pokhrel and Jogen Gazmere were extradited to Bhutan with the connivance of the Government of Nepal.\textsuperscript{65} Between October and December 1989, a total of 45 persons were arrested in connection with dissident political activity. After a trial which lasted for 10 months Tek Nath Rizal was sentenced to life imprisonment on 16 November 1993 by the \textit{Thrimgong Gongma} (High Court) in Thimphu.\textsuperscript{66}

After Tek Nath Rizal's arrest members of the PFHRB dispersed for a while to escape from the wrath of the Bhutan government. It was reconstituted in January 1990 with Tek Nath Rizal as its Chairman-in-absentia, Gopal Sharma as the Vice-Chairman and Kishor Rai as the General Secretary. In May 1990, the Amnesty International adopted Tek Nath Rizal as a "prisoner of conscience".\textsuperscript{67} Under the new leadership of

\textsuperscript{64} Department of Information, n.47, p.3.
\textsuperscript{65} PFHRB, n.58, p.7.
\textsuperscript{67} Amnesty International, n.66, p.1. Also see Bhandari, n.58, pp.31-34.
the PFHRB and the Students' Union of Bhutan (SUB), which was formed on 23 March 1988 at Sherubtse College in Kanglung\(^6^8\) dissident activity increased.

The formation of the Bhutan People’s Party (BPP) on 2 June 1990 at Garganda Tea estate in Siliguri, India was a turning point in the history of the Nepali resistance movement since 1988.\(^6^9\) R.K. Budathoki and D.K. Rai were elected as the President and General Secretary of the Party respectively. According to its manifesto the BPP believes in democracy and egalitarianism. It says:

> The main objectives of the Bhutan People's Party are to achieve democracy, a parliamentary system of government. Constitutional Monarchy and Multi-Party system in Bhutan and to secure to all the citizens, political, economic and social justices; basic human rights; rule of law, cultural and religious rights and freedoms. It shall achieve its goal through peaceful means and SOCIALISM only.

> In essence the BPP is determined to create an EGALITARIAN society in Bhutan by emancipating the Bhutanese society from the yoke of FEUDALISM.\(^7^0\)

The establishment of the BPP intensified the political dissent in Bhutan considerably. The BPP, the PFHRB and the SUB together put forth a charter of thirteen demands ranging from the right to basic freedoms such as that of religion, language, cultural expression and organisation, to far reaching transformations in the kingdom's legal and judicial system and political order, i.e., from an authoritarian to a constitutional

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68 Students’ Union of Bhutan (SUB), *Bhutan Focus* (Phuntsholing), vol.5, no.6, June 1992, p.5.

69 Bhutan People’s Party (BPP), *Objectives, Manifesto and Ideology* (Sarbhang, 2 June 1992), p.3.

70 ibid, pp.3-4.
monarchy.\textsuperscript{71} The release of the charter of demands was followed by a call for an agitation against the Drukpa-dominated political order.\textsuperscript{72}

The BPP tried to launch a protest march to Bhutan from the Indo-Bhutan border at Phuntsholing on 26 August 1990. But it was not allowed by the Indian authorities.\textsuperscript{73} So the Party decided to hold demonstrations inside Bhutan. The plan was to distribute a list of demands to the Dungpas (sub-divisional offers) in each Dzongkhag.\textsuperscript{74}

Demonstrations were organised throughout southern Bhutan on 19 September 1990 and they lasted till 25 September. This was followed by the eruption of fresh demonstrations in Chirang on 4 October 1990. In Chirang and Geylegphug the agitators hoisted the BPP flag along with the national flag at the Dzongkhag headquarters. In Chirang they burned Ghos and Kiras.\textsuperscript{75} As per the government assessment, about 50,000 people were mobilised in the above mentioned demonstrations.\textsuperscript{76} A government publication describes the BPP sponsored demonstrations in the following way:

All the male demonstrators, and even some of the women, came armed with 'khukuries' (knives carried by Nepali men). There was also a notable presence of militants dressed in camouflage uniforms and armed with guns and bombs, amongst all the mobs. As a result of the strict instructions of the Royal Government not to resort to direct firing under any circumstances, the small contingent of security forces in the district headquarters were shot at and attacked with bombs during the demonstrations. 3 police officers and 5 constables were seriously injured.

\textsuperscript{71} For the text of the charter of thirteen demands see Bhutan Solidarity, n.60, pp.53-55.

\textsuperscript{72} Muni, n.3, p.145.

\textsuperscript{73} Strawn, n.7, p.87.

\textsuperscript{74} ibid.


\textsuperscript{76} Kuensel, 22 December 1990.

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and one policeman brutally killed after being abducted by the demonstrators. Although some of the demonstrations were eventually dispersed without any serious incident by the security forces, in several districts and sub-districts government offices were vandalized and public property destroyed, and district officials were forced to accept the written demands of the violent mobs. The mobs destroyed all the census and immigration records in some of these offices. Many government employees were also forcibly stripped off their 'ghos' (national dress worn by men) which were then burnt or cut to pieces by the violent demonstrators.\textsuperscript{77}

The pro-democracy movement gives a totally different picture of the incidents which took place during September-October 1990. A representative version is as follows:

The continuous rallies from September 19 to October 4, 1990 shook the very foundation of absolute rule in Bhutan. Never in the past history of Bhutan had the people taken to streets in such a mass strength. While at many places, the local authorities had shown sympathy to the protestors, the situation turned bloody with the deployment of the Royal Bhutan Army (RBA). The protestors unaware of the army attacks continued their protests for several days, then suddenly the RBA opened fire upon the crowd and charged them with bayonets resulting in the death of several people and injuring scores of them. All the injured persons were admitted to the North Bengal Medical College in Siliguri, West Bengal, India as the government run hospitals in Bhutan refused to admit the injured people. Had there been no army attack, the rallies would have continued for days and months.\textsuperscript{78}

By any standards, the demonstrations that took place in September-October 1990 were the biggest expression of political discontent by the people of Nepali origin after the 1954 Satyagraha organised by the BSC. The spontaneous political upsurge of the people of southern Bhutan send shock waves to the Ngalong elite which rules the country.

\textsuperscript{77} Department of Information, n.47, p.5. Also see Ministry of Home Affairs, n.31, pp.7-8.

\textsuperscript{78} INHURED, n.36, p.10.
III

The government's reaction to the pro-democracy movement after the demonstrations of September-October 1990 was on expected lines. A new term, *Ngolops* (anti-nationals or terrorists) was coined to describe the agitators and it became synonymous with anybody who demanded human rights and democracy in Bhutan. People like Rongthong Kunley, Sonam Tshering and Chheku Drukpa were arrested and detained for carrying out a mass posterering in support of human rights and democracy in eastern Bhutan.79 Apart from these confrontationist measures, the king and his entourage toured throughout Bhutan and addressed public meetings. Through these meetings they tried to instill and stir up *Drukpa* nationalism, conveniently referred to as the Bhutanese nationalism and projected it in opposition to the Nepali ethnic irredentism. As a result of this anti-Nepali campaign, 38,230 people in northern Bhutan volunteered themselves to form a people's militia to be sent to the South.80

Throughout this campaign the king and his entourage tried to portray the people of Nepali origin as traitors and as *Ngolops*. *Kuensel* reported the speech delivered by Dago Tshering, the then Deputy Home Minister and a member of the king's entourage at Lhuntshi as follows:

Dasho Dago Tshering pointed out that the anti-national movement had stemmed from southern Bhutan where the royal government had previously diverted most of the development budget and attention. In its aim to Bhutanise and integrate the immigrant population in the South, the government has favoured the southern dzongkhags in its development planning, he said. But the ngolops, he pointed out, obviously have other motives. The whole purpose of the anti-national movement appears to be to create their

79 ibid.

80 *Kuensel*, National Assembly Supplement, 16 September 1995. Also see *Kuensel* reports on the king's tour to different regions of Bhutan between 13 October 1990 and 29 December 1990.
own separate state, he said. In their call for a pan Himalayan Gorkha Movement, the ngolops had even promised Bhutanese land to outsiders who joined the movement, said Dasho Dago Tshering.\(^{81}\)

The government approached the people of northern and eastern Bhutan with a package including tax exemption as well as financial and developmental assistance. As per this package militia members were exempted from rural taxes for two years. In his tour to eastern Bhutan the king promised a new primary school and a new Basic Health Unit (BHU) in Lhuntshi,\(^{82}\) three new primary schools and a new BHU in Mongar,\(^{83}\) exemption from rural taxes, construction of a new power project and a sawmill in Tashigang,\(^{84}\) a new hospital, three new BHUs, and a sawmill in Pemagatshel,\(^{85}\) and three new BHUs, two new roads, and the establishment of an auction yard in Samdrup Jongkhar.\(^{86}\)

Armed with propaganda, military might and the package of developmental assistance, the government started crushing the pro-democracy movement. Within weeks after the 1990 demonstrations, the government placed southern Bhutan under the control of the Royal Bhutan Army (RBA).\(^{87}\) Subsequently most of the schools and hospitals were closed and occupied by the security forces to be used as barracks to keep control

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\(^{81}\) Kuensel, 8 December 1990.

\(^{82}\) ibid.

\(^{83}\) Kuensel, 15 December 1990.

\(^{84}\) Kuensel, 22 December 1990.

\(^{85}\) Kuensel, 29 December 1990.

\(^{86}\) ibid.

of southern Bhutan. About the terror unleashed by the government, David B. Thronson writes:

Following the September 1990 demonstrations, raids by army on Southern Bhutanese homes became common. People frequently were beaten and questioned on participation in anti-national activities. Rape was widely reported. Many were detained, for periods ranging from a few days to a year, in prisons or the local schools which were converted into army barracks and jails.

The government publications also confirm the state violence imposed on southern Bhutan. One government publication says:

In order to maintain law and order and to help restore peace and normalcy in the southern districts, the Royal Government was left with no alternative but to reinforce the Royal Bhutan Police with whatever troops the small Royal Bhutan Army could spare. In spite of the continuing terrorist activities and the threats against the lives of all government officials, the Royal Government have [sic] kept open all basic facilities.

88 Sharma, n.36,p.15. Also see HUROB, n.62, p.7.
89 Thronson, n.49, p.27. Also see HUROB, n.62, p.7. Interviews carried out by the author in the refugee camps revealed that the people of Nepali origin were harassed by the security forces. Kamala Devi Chhetri of Beldangi-I refugee camp who is from Samchi Dzongkhag was compelled by the security forces to sign the Voluntary Migration Form and asked to leave the country. Bhim Kumar Rai of Beldangi-I refugee camp who is from Geylegphug Dzongkhag, the first graduate in Bhutan, was harassed by the police due to his involvement in the PFHRB activities. He left the country in 1990. Prem Gurung of Timai refugee camp who is from Samdrup Jongkhar Dzongkhag was thrown out of the country for his participation in the 1990 September-October demonstrations. Harka Maya Rai of Timai refugee camp who is from Geylegphug Dzongkhag had to leave the country due to the threat of her daughters being raped by the army personnel. Deva Maya Kharki of Goldhap refugee camp who is from Geylegphug Dzongkhag was injured in a shoot-out by the army. Maitrika Sharma of Goldhap refugee camp who is from Geylegphug Dzongkhag had to leave the country due to his participation in the 1990 September-October demonstrations. Tek Bir Rai of Khudnabari refugee camp who is from Samchi Dzongkhag left the country due to police harassment. Ratna Bahadur Thappa of Khudnabari refugee camp who is from Samdrup Jongkhar Dzongkhag left the country due to police harassment. Abhi Narayan Adhikari of Sanischare refugee camp who is from Dagana Dzongkhag left Bhutan due to the harassment by the army. Ram Prasad Subedi of Sanischare refugee camp who is from Dagana Dzongkhag was compelled to leave the country due to his participation in the 1990 September-October demonstrations.
and infrastructures in the southern Dzongkhags through the deployment of the security forces.\textsuperscript{90}

The closure of schools and hospitals denied the basic rights of education and health care to the people. Soon, the government enacted strict control on movement and acquisition of goods in the southern Dzongkhags. Shops were closed and the people were not allowed to sell their produce or buy items outside of the Food Corporation of Bhutan (FCB) stores. The food distribution outlets were reduced from 63 to 33. This blocked the flow of essential food commodities including common salt to the commoners in the South. Like the closure of schools and hospitals, movement and commerce restrictions came as a severe punishment to the people of southern Bhutan under the guise of protecting southern Bhutan from the Ngolops.\textsuperscript{91}

The physical and cultural harassment experienced by the Bhutanese of Nepali origin under the Bhutanese state resulted in their exodus from the country. The eviction of the people of Nepali origin started soon after the protest rallies staged during September-October 1990. The people who left Bhutan came to India at first and set up refugee camps along the Indo-Bhutan border. But the refugees were harassed by the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and the Assam Police. Assam police arrested some of the refugees and even handed them over to the Bhutanese authorities. The harassment experienced by the refugees in India ultimately led them to move to eastern Nepal.\textsuperscript{92}

\textsuperscript{90} Department of information, n.47, p.5.
\textsuperscript{91} Dhaka! and Strawn, n.6, pp.243-4. Also see Sharma, n.36, p.14.
\textsuperscript{92} Author's interview with Bhimkumar Rai who is from Geylegphug Dzongkhag on 9 December 1995 at the Beldangi I refugee camp in Damak, Jhapa District, Nepal. Also see S.K. Pradhan, "Human Rights Situation in Bhutan: Appeal by PFHRB", \textit{IMADR Review for Research and Action}, no.4, September 1994, p.3.
Initially, the Nepal government was not willing to let the refugees into the country. After repeated appeals made by the Bhutanese dissident activists to the then Nepal Prime Minister, K.P. Bhattarai, Nepal accepted the refugees from February 1991 onwards.\(^\text{93}\) Since then refugees from Bhutan are flocking to Nepal. According to certain reports, an estimated 105,000 ethnic Nepalis left Bhutan since 1990,\(^\text{94}\) of which 89,486 refugees are living in eight United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) camps in Morang and Jhapa Districts of eastern Nepal. According to the UNHCR estimates, around 15,000 non-registered refugees are residing outside the camps.\(^\text{95}\)

In a significant development in the month of May 1991, two top ranking officials R.B. Basnet, Managing Director of the State Trading Corporation of Bhutan and Bhim Subba, Director General of the Power Department left Bhutan.\(^\text{96}\) They got political asylum in Nepal. The government alleged large scale corruption and financial irregularities in the offices of these two senior bureaucrats.\(^\text{97}\) Basnet’s and Bhim Subba’s resignations were followed by many more resignations. "From 1990 till date 461 Lhotshampa civil servants have left Bhutan... some of them inflicted great loss on

\(^{93}\) Dhakal and Strawn, n.6, pp.267-8.

\(^{94}\) *The Pioneer* (New Delhi), 19 March 1995.

\(^{95}\) Author’s interview with Arun Sala-Ngarm, Head of Sub-Office, UNHCR, Jhapa on 13 December 1995 at Bhadrapur, Jhapa District, Nepal. The eight UNHCR camps are the following: (1) Sanischare, Morang District; (2) Beldangi-I; (3) Beldangi-II; (4) Beldangi-II Extention; (5) Khudnabari (North); (6) Khudnabari (South); (7) Timai; (8) Goldhap - all in Jhapa District.

\(^{96}\) Department of Information, n.47, p.6.

\(^{97}\) ibid, pp.6-7.
the government by misappropriating large amounts of government money and property before absconding."98

While the people of Nepali origin were leaving the country out of fear of torture, *Kuensel*, the official organ of the Royal Government of Bhutan was publishing reports on *Ngolop* violence in southern Bhutan.99 As per the government’s statistics by August 1995, "the *ngolops* had committed 68 confirmed murders and 960 cases of dacoity and armed robbery...physically attacked and injured 664 Bhutanese nationals and carried out 65 ambushes and attacks on the security forces and government officials."100

Due to the state sanctioned eviction of the people of Nepali origin and their "voluntary migration" from Bhutan, refugee population in the UNHCR camps in eastern Nepal increased. The people who signed Voluntary Migration Forms and left Bhutan lost their right to return to Bhutan once and for all.101 "Some people had left Bhutan for another reason: this was that their village communities were required to leave *en masse* as a collective punishment inflicted by the local authorities following a murder or robbery in the locality attributed to ‘anti-nationals’."102 From Samchi and Geylegphug

98 Bhutan Foreign Affairs Minister Dawa Tsering’s interview with *Himal*, vol.7, no.4, July/August 1994, p.23. Also see *Kuensel*, National Assembly Supplement, 16 September 1995.


102 ibid, pp.3-4.
Dzongkhags alone around 40,000 Nepalis have left for the refugee camps.\textsuperscript{103}

Regarding the state of affairs in southern Bhutan, A.C.Sinha observes:

One can see barren, overgrown paddy fields, deserted villages, and crumbling houses all over southern Bhutan. While they do fear the violence from former neighbours now in the refugee camps, the loyal Lhotshampa are losing faith in the Bhutanese system as well. Although the king, the royal family, and a number of higher officials have been sympathetic to the Lhotshampa who have stayed, many Drukpas do not hide their pleasure at the plight of the Nepalis who remain behind.\textsuperscript{104}

IV

Since the exodus of refugees started after anti-government demonstrations during September-october 1990, the dissident political activity was carried onward by the refugees in exile. As the pro-democracy movement has grown in strength, the various trends dormant in the movement began to surface. As time elapsed, the inherent weaknesses and contradictions in the movement became evident. The organisations which initially led the pro-democracy movement like the PFHRB, the SUB and the BPP distanced themselves from each other and started functioning independently. Apart from BPP three other political parties namely the Bhutan National Democratic Party (BNDP), the Bhutan Congress Party (BCP) and the Druk National Congress (DNC) have been formed. The PFHRB underwent reorganisation and split into three groups, namely, the Human Rights Organisation of Bhutan (HUROB), and the two splinter groups of the PFHRB led by S.K. Pradhan and D.P. Kafle respectively.

The BNDP was commissioned by a Party Commission Committee (PCC) on 7 February 1992 in New Delhi, with R.B. Basnet as the President and D.N.S. Dhakal as


\textsuperscript{104} ibid.
the General Secretary. The Party believes that, “multi-party parliamentary democracy, the only viable alternative to absolute monarchy, is the need of time for safeguarding the rights and freedom of individuals.”

Likewise, the Party identifies two important social classes in Bhutan and locate their role in the society as follows:

Today’s Bhutanese society is layered into two groups: (a) royalties and nobles, with substantial capital assets, and (b) the subsistence farmers. The Third Group, assertive and educated, is in the process of formation. A tunnel vision for long-term welfare maximization will be to convert the royalties and nobles into progressive (business) capitalists to usher growth in trade, commerce, and industry and the subsistence farmers as the continual source of human capital (Third Group) for providing intellectual and logistic support in running businesses of the capitalists. This paradigm fits well with the theory of economic development for a natural resource poor country like Bhutan.

On the economic front, the Party stands for "Mutually Beneficial Capitalism" (MBC) and in foreign policy, for the maintenance of "warm and friendly diplomatic relationship" with India and promises to honour the 1949 Indo-Bhutan Treaty. BNDP maintains that "the southern problem is a struggle for democracy" and demands for "the establishment of constitutional monarchy in a multi-party democratic set up, institution of secular constitution, and respect for the 1948 UN Declaration for Human Rights in all parts of Bhutan."

105 Dhakal and Strawn, n.6, p.290.
107 ibid.
108 ibid.
109 ibid.
The HUROB was formed on 7 September 1992. Tek Nath Rizal was selected as the organisation's Chairman in-absentia. S.B.Subba is currently the Acting Chairman of HUROB. The other prominent leaders are Bhim Subba, Om Dhungel and Dr. Bhampa Rai. As per a HUROB publication, this organisation "was constituted in exile to promote the cause of human rights and democratic reforms in Bhutan". The BNDP and the HUROB work very closely. Their relationship is basically complimentary.

Apart from HUROB, another organisation called the Association of Human Rights Activists, Bhutan (AHURA Bhutan) is actively involved in the human rights aspects of the pro-democracy movement. It was formed on 16 November 1992 as a human rights group which claims to have no connections with any of the political parties. Ratan Gazmere is the Chief Co-ordinator of the organisation. The AHURA Bhutan, is primarily active in and around the refugee camps and maintain contacts with international human rights organisations.

The BCP was formed in May 1993 after a split in the BPP. D.B.Rai, who had been one of the General Secretaries of the BPP, became the President of the BCP. Except in issuing a few press statements, the BCP could not make much headway.

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110 HUROB, n.62, p.8.
111 ibid. Also see Thronson, n.49, pp.45-47.
113 Strawn, n.7, pp.134-5.
114 Thronson, n. 49, p.45.
The first non-Nepali political party in the history of Bhutan, the DNC was formed on 16 June 1994. Rongthong Kunley Dorji, a prominent Sarchop businessman from eastern Bhutan is the Chairman of the DNC. As per the Party’s manifesto, it stands for a "Buddhist Constitutional Monarchical Kingdom". The Manifesto says:

The present primary objective of the Druk National Congress shall be to establish a Parliamentary democracy in Bhutan, to declare Bhutan a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, indivisible independent and democratic Buddhist Constitutional Monarchical Kingdom and to secure and guarantee to all its citizens fundamental rights, including the right to equality, freedom and justice, irrespective of their religion, race, sex, caste, tribe or ideological conviction.

On 28 May 1995 the DNC carried out a nationwide poster campaign inside Bhutan. The main demands raised by the DNC through this poster campaign were the following:

1. Honour the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in its totality and ensure that these rights are protected under the rule of law.
2. Stop all forms of forced labour.
3. Stop government interference in religious affairs.
5. Ensure Freedom of opinion and expression, and equality to all.
6. Establish an independent judiciary.
7. Stop discrimination and victimisation in the civil and security services. Provide an atmosphere whereby government servants can contribute their best and are rewarded with opportunities for promotion etc. according to merit.

116 ibid, p.8.
(8) Stop manipulating and using the security forces to terrorise the same people they are supposed to protect. Stop arbitrary arrests, kidnappings and torture in custody. Treat human beings like human beings.

(9) Utilise funds and resources properly and make sure it benefits all our people and not just those with vested interests and senior government officers.\textsuperscript{118}

The formation of the DNC and its support to the refugees and their political struggle has radically altered the character of the pro-democracy movement. Now the pro-democracy movement represents the true features of a genuine national democratic movement.\textsuperscript{119}

Till 1995 the above mentioned political parties and human rights groups were carrying out their activities on their own organisational basis. This became disastrous for the pro-democracy movement. The futility of isolated resistance offered by various political parties and human rights groups to the Government of Bhutan compelled them to form a united front. Towards this goal a political process was initiated and seven dissident groups declared the formation of the Bhutanese Coalition for Democratic Movement (BCDM) on 22 June 1995.\textsuperscript{120} Later, more groups were included in BCDM and subsequently renamed itself into BCDM General Assembly. The objectives of the BCDM General Assembly are the following:

(1) to plan strategies and co-ordinate activities of all the dissident organisations working for democratic movement in Bhutan;

\textsuperscript{118} Quoted from the DNC poster given to the author by Rongthong Kunley Dorji at Kathmandu on 18 November 1995.

\textsuperscript{119} Author's interview with D.N.S.Dhakal on 5 December 1995 at Birtamod, Jhapa District, Nepal.

\textsuperscript{120} Bhutanese Coalition for Democratic Movement (BCDM) General Assembly, \textit{Bhutanese Coalition for Democratic Movement General Assembly} (n.p., n.d.).
to ensure safe and honourable repatriation of all Bhutanese in exile under guaranteed safety and security.\textsuperscript{121}

The formation of the BCDM was followed by the formation of the Appeal Movement Coordinating Council (AMCC). The AMCC was formally launched on 7 September 1995.\textsuperscript{122} The AMCC "envisages the restoration of fundamental human rights in Bhutan and the early repatriation of the Bhutanese refugees to their houses and hearths in Bhutan."\textsuperscript{123}

While the BCDM General Assembly is a political forum, consisting of political parties, youth and student organisations, demanding drastic democratic changes in the political system of Bhutan, the AMCC is a human rights action group appealing to the king for restoration of democratic rights and an early repatriation of the refugees.\textsuperscript{124}

The BCDM General Assembly explains the refugee problem as part of a deep-rooted political crisis that engulfed Bhutanese politics and expects a protracted struggle for the establishment of democracy and human rights.\textsuperscript{125} The AMCC views the refugee problem as an issue of human rights violation that can be resolved through a non-violent struggle.\textsuperscript{126}

However, due to the hectic political activities of both the BCDM General Assembly and the AMCC, the refugees are getting politicised. The politicisation of the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{121} ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{122} Appeal Movement Coordinating Council (AMCC) \textit{AMCC Newsletter} (Damak), vol.1, no.1, November 1995, p.1.
\item \textsuperscript{123} ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{124} Sinha, n.103, p.39.
\item \textsuperscript{125} Author's interview with Om Dhungel on 13 November 1995 at Kathmandu.
\item \textsuperscript{126} Author's interview with Jogen Gazmere on 2 December 1995 at Damak, Jhapa District, Nepal.
\end{itemize}
Bhutanese refugees will be having serious impacts on the political developments of Bhutan, Nepal and the Nepali-dominated areas of India.

A Ministerial Joint Committee (MJC) was set up between Nepal and Bhutan in July 1993 regarding the repatriation of the refugees. The Committee agreed to categorise the refugees into (a) bonafide Bhutanese evicted forcefully (b) Bhutanese who have emigrated. (c) non-Bhutanese people and (d) people who have committed criminal offenses. They also decided to form a Joint Verification Team (JVT) with five members from each country who could group the refugees into different categories.

The government of Nepal asserts that 60,000 refugees in the UNHCR camps belong to the category of "Bhutanese who have emigrated" and all of them should be taken back by Bhutan. They also say that the "non-Bhutanese" or stateless people, who are long term residents of Bhutan, should be given a chance to return. But Bhutan is only willing to take back the first category, i.e., bonafide Bhutanese evicted forcefully. Even seven rounds of bilateral talks between Nepal and Bhutan could not resolve the tangle. The negotiations are expected to continue.

Methods employed to evolve the above mentioned four-fold categorisation were not disclosed in public by the governments both of Nepal and Bhutan. "It is not yet known how it will be decided whether a person is 'Bhutanese' (categories one, two and

130 Kuensel, 13 April 1996. Also see Kuensel, National Assembly Supplement, 10 August 1996.
four) or 'non-Bhutanese' (category three). According to Amnesty International the four-fold categorisation does not confirm the provisions of international human rights law. It is observed that:

...international human rights law guarantees people the right to return to their own country, whether or not they have been formally recognized as citizens of that country. Clarification is needed as to whether this guarantee will be enforced to ensure everybody whose own country is Bhutan is able to return there should they wish to do so. If, instead, it is the citizenship laws of Bhutan alone which will be applied to determine who will return, as implied by the four categories, then the categorization gives cause for concern because it is unlikely that the guarantees provided under international law will be fulfilled.

The four-fold categorisation formulated by the MJC was rejected completely by the refugees. The refugees lost all hope in the continuing bilateral talks between Nepal and Bhutan. The camp dwellers want India to intervene and resolve the crisis. Refugee leaders are also of the same opinion. But the political leaders in Nepal are of the opinion that the issue should be resolved through bilateral negotiations.

The concentration of refugees in the politically volatile districts of Morang and Jhapa in eastern Nepal has resulted in serious social tension between the refugees and the

132 ibid.
133 Author's interview with camp dwellers between 30 November and 16 December 1995.
134 Author's interview with R.B. Basnet, Bhim Subba and Om Dhungel on 13 November and S.K. Pradhan on 16 November 1995 at Kathmandu; with Jogen Gazmre, Damber S.Ghalley and Dr. Bhampa Rai on 2 December and Viswanath Chhetri and Tenzing Zangpo on 4 December 1995 at Damak, Jhapa District; with Durga Giri, D.P. Kaffe, and D.N.S.Dhakal between on 5 December 1995 at Birtamod, Jhapa District, Nepal.
135 Author's interview with Girija Prasad Koirala on 14 November, Khadga Prasad Oli on 16 November and Chakra Prasad Bastola on 28 November 1995 at Kathmandu.
local people. The national and provincial leaders of different political parties in Nepal and the district authorities are of the opinion that the refugees are wresting the job opportunities from the labourers of the local areas. They also allege that refugees are violating the forest laws and indulging in prostitution. 136

Though the Government of Bhutan repeatedly say that the majority of the camp dwellers are not from Bhutan, the UNHCR officials outrightly reject this argument. According to the UNHCR officials, 90 percent of the camp dwellers are from Bhutan. 137 The UNHCR officials are also critical about the four-fold categorisation of refugees formulated by the MJC and they demand a political solution to resolve the refugee problem. 138 Some of them even suggest India's intervention in resolving the crisis. 139

The refugees are sociologically very much different from the people of Morang and Jhapa Districts. They do not want to be assimilated into the local population. The sophisticated confinement of the refugees in the UNHCR camps and their frustration due to the apathy of the Bhutanese government in resolving the refugee crisis might lead to a camp-based militant political agitation.

136 Author's interview with Khadga Prasad Oli on 16 November and Chakra Prasad Bastola on 28 November 1995 at Kathmandu; with Krishna Prasad Sitoula and Birendra Kumar Sinha on 18 December 1995 at Chandragadi, Jhapa District, and Dilip Rai on 18 December 1995 at Birtamod, Jhapa District, Nepal.

137 Author's interview with Arun Sala-Ngarm on 13 December 1995 at Chandragadi, Jhapa District, Nepal.

138 Author's interview with Rossella Pagliuchi-Lor on 17 November 1995 at Kathmandu.

139 Author's interview with Arun Sala-Ngarm on 13 December 1995 at Chandragadi, Jhapa District, Nepal.