

## Movement Of Gorkhas For Constitutional Status In India

**Surya Newar**

Research Scholar, Deptt of Pol Science,  
Magadh University, Bodh Gaya,  
Asst Prof. Dept of Pol Science, Kapili College,  
Kheroni, Karbi Anglong, Assam, India

**Prof. Jainandan Pd. Singh**

HOD & Supervisor, Deptt of Political Science,  
Magadh University, Bodh Gaya

*Abstract: The movement for distinct Gorkha identity in India first originated in Darjeeling under the banner of the All India Gorkha League (1943). In due course of time some other organisations formed as a messiah of the Gorkhas such as the Assam Provincial Gorkha League, the Assam Gorkha Sammelon, the Gorkha National Liberation Front, the Gorkha Janamukti Morcha, the Navadhwani Sangthan, the Nepali Sahitya Parishad, Assam, All Assam Nepali Students' Union, the Nepali Janasangrham Parishad, the Nepali Suraksha Parishad, the Bharatiya Gorkha Parishangh, Gorkha, the Autonomous Council Demand Committee etc. All most all these different organisations of Gorkhas placed a plethora of demands before the government in order to safeguard their legitimate interest.*

*This papers address the existence of Gorkhas in India, role of these organisations and how the politically awareness brought them organised to assert their status.*

*Keywords: Gorkha existence, political consciousness, role of Gorkha organisations and demands for constitutional status.*

### I. INTRODUCTION

The Gorkhas are the citizens of India as per the Gazette notification of the Government of India on the issue of citizenship of the Gorkhas of India. However, the Indian Gorkhas have been facing with a unique identity crisis with regard to their Indian citizenship because of the Indo-Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship (1950) that permits "on a reciprocal basis, the nationals of one country in the territories of the other the same privileges in the matter of residence, ownership of property, participation in trade and commerce, movement and other privileges of a similar nature". Thus, there are also many Nepalese citizens of Nepal living in India as well as Indian citizens living in Nepal. The Indian Gorkhas are mistakenly identified as Nepali people (People from Nepal), which has led to several movements of the Indian Gorkhas, including the Gorkhaland movement, for a clear recognition of their Indian identity and citizenship. But the Gorkhas in India faced a lot of problem after independence. To fulfil their demands the Gorkhas of Assam under the banner of organizations such as Assam Gorkha Sammelan

(AGS), All Assam Nepali Students' Union now All Assam Gorkha Students Union etc. have placed various demands to the Government of Assam as well as India. Such demands are to include Gorkhas in to the minority class, Schedule caste and Schedule Tribe, protect them in tribal belt and block, introduce Nepali subject in the UG and Post Graduate level, satellite council to the Gorkhas and so on. The AIGL 'agitational politics which made Hillmans' Association quite irrelevant rallied around two agendas- (1) the recognition of the Nepali language and the conferment of citizenship on the Indian Gorkhas. Along with its proposal for pertaining away from Bengal it was noted that either- (1) Darjeeling Duars and Assam should form a single province or (2) the districts of Darjeeling the districts of Jalpaiguri, Sikkim and Cooch Behar State should form a separate province.

### II. AREA OF STUDY

The present study is related to the Gorkhas living in India and their movement for constitutional status. Attempt has been

made to find out its root causes, migration and existence of Gorkhas in India and their movement for constitutional status.

#### METHOD ADOPTED FOR THE STUDY

In the present writing mainly secondary sources data have been used like articles, journals, books, annual report, proceedings of different Gorkha organisations, websites etc.

#### THE MAIN OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- ✓ To know about existence and of Gorkhas in India
- ✓ To find out the constitutional movements launched by different Gorkha organisations.
- ✓ To know how far the Gorkhas able to full fill their demands and
- ✓ To know the ongoing Gorkha movements in different parts of India.

The seed of movement for distinct identity of the Gorkhas in India was first sown in Darjeeling of west Bengal. The Gorkhas<sup>1</sup> became increasingly conscious to protect and preserve their distinct identity and thereby to ensure all round development on the eve of the independence of the country. The All India Gurkha League (AIGL), 1943 pleaded to recognize the Gorkhas as a “minority community” as a measure of maintaining distinct identity, the integration of Nepali inhabiting areas of India into a single whole. As such, the AIGL convincingly pleaded for the integration of Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri districts of west Bengal into Assam<sup>2</sup> in a memorandum submitted to the Governor General of India in May, 1947. The Gorkha elite of Darjeeling, perhaps, thought that the integration of these territories into Assam might facilitate them to consolidate their numerical strength which would help them to be united and raised the demands. In 1952 the AIGL highlighted three alternatives:

- ✓ Darjeeling district should be treated as a single administrative unit directly under centre supervision.
- ✓ Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar and Sikkim should form a separate province.
- ✓ Merger of Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri with Assam.

The above mentioned alternatives unanimously favoured separation from Bengal. AIGL was successful in 1961 in getting the Nepali language recognized as the official language in the Darjeeling hills. In 1967 AIGL supported and joined the United Front Ministry and at their insistence the West Bengal State Assembly although passed a resolution endorsing for regional autonomy but remained silent on the nature and extent of the autonomy. The Gorkha elites, however, well conceived that they must increase the contour of organization in order to protect their interests in India. In view of this, they started mobilizing Gorkha Speaking population living in other part of the country seeking support for their pressing demand. In this way, the Assam Provincial Gorkha League was formed in 1944 at the initiative of the AIGL with similar aims and objectives. The Assam provincial Gorkha League extended its full-fledged backing and support to the demands of the AIGL and in its maiden annual conference held at Gauhati on 31 December 1946 and 1st January 1947, unanimously resolved:

*The three million Gorkhas, through sharing common tradition with rest of the Indian nevertheless, have a language, culture and tradition of their own; thus forming a distinct community in India. Hence, this session of the Assam provincial Gurkha league demands the constituent Assembly to recognize the Gorkhas Statutorily as a minority community of India.*

Notwithstanding, the Gorkha elite of Assam started demanding the inclusion of Gorkhas into the list of Other Backward Classes (OBC) after the independence of the country. They realized that it was necessary to get the Gorkhas recognized as a backward class in order to remove their socio-economic backwardness and elevate their overall status. Keeping this in mind Dalbirsingh Lohar, the lone Nepali member moved a resolution in the Assam legislative Assembly which maintained: *In view of appalling illiteracy and poverty of the bulk of the people of Gurkha Community in Assam, this Assembly is of the opinion that the Government of Assam do move to the Government of India if necessary to recognize the said community as a backward.*

Mention may be made here is that there is social hierarchy in the caste system of the Nepali Community like any other Hindu castes system. In fact, the Nepalese belonging to Tibeto-Mongoloid group such as the Rais, The Limbus, the Tamangs, the Gurungs, the Mogors, the Bhujels, the Sarkis, the Damais, the Kamis, the Ganes are much more backward than the Indo-Aryans groups like the Brahmis, (including Upadhaya, Khanal, Gauttam, Dahal, Sarmah, Timsina, Neupane), Chetries, the Khatrias, the Thakuris and the Ranas, the Newars. The Tibeto-Mongoloid groups of the Gorkha community are considered as low caste and they were included in the list of “Other Backward Classes” (OBC). However, it did not console to the Gorkha elite and they felt that it was insufficient for ascertaining all-round, development by mere inclusion of a few castes in the list of OBC. Therefore, the Gorkha elite pleaded for the inclusion of backward castes of the Gorkha Community particularly belonging to the Tibeto-Mongoloid stock into the list of scheduled Tribes. Hence, a memorandum was submitted by the most articulate organization of the Gorkhas named Assam Gorkha Sammelan to the government of India on 24th July 1968, demanded: *On behalf of the Indian Nepalese in general and the Nepalese of Assam in particular, it is requested that due consideration be made for their miserable plight to include the Nepalese as a Tribes of the Constitution so that they may get scope for coming up to the level of their compatriot in course of time and be able to share the sorrow and happening of the land under the same roof on equal footing with the rest of citizens of the country.*

It is to mention here that the demand of the Gorkha elite was not limited only with the recognition of backward castes of the Nepalese community as Scheduled Tribe but also pleaded for the recognition of socially depressed sections of the Nepalese as Scheduled caste. They believed that the socio-economic backwardness of the Tibeto-Mongoloid group of the Nepalese could not be eradicated unless and until they were recognized as Scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. Indeed, there were some justifications of their argument that though similar castes of the Gorkhas were being recognized as the Scheduled castes and Scheduled Tribes (SC & ST) in other

states of India particularly in West Bengal and Sikkim. Obviously, therefore, the Gorkha elite developed a sense of deprivation, discrimination as well as humiliation because the same benefits were not extended to their counterparts in Assam.

Another articulate organization of the Gorkhas of Assam namely the All Assam Nepali Students' Union founded in 1976, has also been very much concerned about the various problems of their community. They realized that the Nepalese in Assam were more backward than other backward communities of the State, for which they felt the need of certain constitutional safeguards so as to remove their backwardness. In view of this, like the AGS, the AANSU also put forward similar demands and grievances before the concerned authority and as such a memorandum was submitted to the Prime Minister of India on 24th July, 1980 by the AANSU and logically pleaded:

*The Nepalese of India are Hindu by religion and as they inherit the virtues and vices of the great Hindu Society. They are traditional backward and neglected castes and Tribes including 'untouchables' have their counterparts among the Nepali speaking people also, but they are not enlisted as Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribe. For example, Domoi, Kami, Gainay, Bhujel and Sarki should be enlisted as Scheduled Castes. Similarly, Limbu, Rai, Mogar, Gurung, Bhutia, Lepcha etc are the counterparts of the recognized Scheduled Tribes of other Hindus. The list is not exhaustive. We urge upon the Government to prepare the list of the Nepali-speaking social groups who may be recognized as Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes after consulting the various social organizations like Assam Gorkha Sammelon, All India Nepali Bhasa Samiti etc.*

The All Tai-Ahom Students' Union, All Assam Tribal Union, All Assam Chutiya Sanmilan and Jharkhand Sangram Parishad floated an organization under the name and style of the United Reservation Movement Council of Assam (URMCA) in 1986.9 The AANSU became a constituent organ of the URMCA since their demands got a place to find out a solution in the charter of demands of later Furthermore, the Gorkha elite raised another very important demand of the Gorkha Community was the demand for constitutional recognition of "Nepali language" under eighth schedule of the constitution of India. It is known to all that the constitution of India has guaranteed the right to preserve cultivates and promotes the language and culture of different communities. In consonance with this the Gorkhas were too desired to preserve their socio-cultural heritage including the language as a measure of maintaining distinct identity. They deeply believed that the constitutional recognition of Nepali language was quite imperative for the maintenance of Gorkha identity. It may be noted that after independence especially when the provinces were to be reorganized on the basis of linguistic principle, the Gorkha elite of Darjeeling also put forward the demand for constitutional recognition of their language so that they might have a separate state in the days ahead on the basis of distinct Nepali language. Thus, like the demand for "Minority Status" the linguistic demand of the Gorkha too first started in other parts of India, more particularly, in Dehradun of Utter Pradesh. Of course, the leadership of the linguistic movement of the Gorkhas was premeditatedly shifted to

Darjeeling in the late fifties of the last century, when the district Committee of the AIGL adopted a resolution demanding constitutional recognition of Nepali language in 1959. The Gorkhas of India were encouraged by a renowned linguistic writer Suniti Kumar Chatterjee. The Gorkha elite, while justifying their demand, very often referred to the remark made by him who maintained in his famous book "Languages and Literatures of Modern India" (1956) other Indian languages are to be added in this (Eighth) schedule following the wishes of their speakers and their importance i.e. Sindhi and Nepali". This kind of remarks invariably encouraged the Nepali elite to pursue their linguistic demand which they thought, would ensure the maintenance of their distinct identity in India. Furthermore, the constitutional recognition of Sindhi language in 1967 made the Gorkha elite more aggrieved and assertive of their linguistic demand. Thus, in order to popularize and mobilize their people in a bigger way the elites decided to form a separate organization specially to pressurize the linguistic demand the All India Nepali Bhasa Samiti (hereinafter the AINBS) on January 31, 1972 at Darjeeling. This way, the linguistic movement of the Gorkhas in India assumed greater significance with the formation of the AINBS which thenceforth spearheaded the linguistic movement of the Gorkha in India. At the same time, it was felt by the Gorkha Leadership that the Gorkhas of other part of the country need to be vigorously mobilized and actively involved in order to fulfill there linguistic demand.

The Government of India however, in the long run realized the legitimacy and justification of linguistic demand of the Gorkha Community and therefore decided to incorporate Nepali language in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution of India. As a result, the parliament of India accorded the demand for constitutional recognition of Nepali language along with Manipuri and Konkani on 20th August, 1992. Thus, the dream of Gorkhas of India has come to be a reality due to the relentless efforts and determined attitude of the socio-cultural organizations of the Gorkhas.

Another crucial demand made by the Gorkhas is the demand for inclusion of their cultivators and graziers in to the list of protected class. The non-tribal particularly the Gorkha cultivators and graziers living in the tribal Belts and Blocks since the colonial era were accorded the status of 'Protected Class' in 1949 and similar benefits were extended to the Gorkha cultivators and graziers. But the Government of Assam unilaterally excluded the Gorkha Community from the list of 'Protected Class' particularly those Who entered the Tribal Belts and Blocks in the post colonial period 1969 the colonial era i.e. 1947.

It may be mention here that the due to the relentless demands from the organizations such as AGS, AAGSU the Government of Assam has created the Gorkha Development Council (GDC) in 2010 along with other thirteen tribes of Assam which is funded by the Assam Government for the socio-economic development of the ethnic community.

The Gorkhas of Darjeeling even adopted the violent method to get their separate demand fulfilled. As such the militant organization the Gorkha National Liberation Front under Subhash Ghising was formed 1980 which had some characteristics. The GNLF movement resorted to violent armed confrontation with the state Government and in this

clash the main targets were the CPI (M) activists. "It is noteworthy that Ghising did not put much emphasis on the traditional demand for inclusion of Nepali language in the Eighth Schedule."

Ghising was vehemently opposed to Indo-Nepal friendship treaty of 1950 which made Nepalese according to him refugees on Indian soil. He proposed Gorkhaland for all the hills and Terai areas of the Darjeeling District which were ceded by Sikkim and Bhutan to the British between 1835 and 1865. The provocative speeches of Ghising, the use of the Nepali ethnic symbols e.g. Khukri, the procession, meeting helped to enlist the support of Nepali youths and created a distance between the hill people and the people living the plains. On 4 May, 1986 a large number of GNLFF volunteers drew blood from their thumbs with kukris to write posters in blood on Gorkhaland. This hard line of the GNLFF soon captured the minds of the students, youths and a section of the intellectuals. It proceeded with a definite plan and programmed. The GNLFF insisted on the formation of a separate state. On July, 1988 all the delegates of GNLFF unanimously resolved to abandon the "do or die" struggle, threatening bloodshed and mayhem in Darjeeling. To paralyze the administration the GNLFF gave a 40-day bandh call. To combat lawlessness the state Govt. stepped up its repressive measures and invoked the Anti-Terrorist Act. About 2000 people were arrested under this act. Violence and counter violence continued in the hill areas and the common people were disgusted with bandhs and violence.

Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC) was formed after two years of violent separatist movement (1986-1988) with the signing a tripartite agreement on 22nd August, 1988 between the Central Government of India represented by C.G. Somiah, the Union Home Secretary, state Government representative R.N. Sengupta, the state Chief Secretary and Subhash Ghising on behalf of GNLFF. The Union Home Minister, Buta Singh and West Bengal Chief Minister Joyti Bosa also put their signature on the agreement. By this accord Ghising agreed to "drop the demand for a separate state. The tripartite agreement also granted for the sixth schedule status to Darjeeling district. The G.T.A. (Gorkhaland Territorial Administration) was created by the signing a tripartite agreement on 18th July, 2011 at Darjeeling in the presence of Shri P. Chidambaram, Hon'ble Union Home Minister, Miss Mamata Banerjee, Hon'ble Chief Minister and Bimal Gurung, President, G.J.M.M. due to the relentless movement of the Gorkha organisations and the people of Darjeeling district. However, after signing the treaty, Bimal Gurung said It is a temporary settlement and our main objective will be achieved by Gorkhaland only.

In protest against discrimination in giving OI (Original Inhabitant) status to the Gorkhas of Assam in the National Register of Citizens (NRC) upgradation process, Harka Bahadur Chhetri chairman of Gorkha Autonomous Council Demand Committee (GACDC) started Marathon March starting on 19<sup>th</sup> July 2016 from Mukong to Guwahati covering 560 K.M. While starting off the rally from Murkong Selek Gorkhafa of Assam Harka Bahadur Chhetri said, 'Gorkhas of Assam have settled since time immemorial and have extensively contributed to national building process and the freedom struggle movement. So, denying Original Inhabitant

and Indigenous status to Gorkhas in Assam in up-gradation process of NRC is sheer discrimination and attempt to deprive fundamental rights of genuine Indian citizens.' The Chief minister Mr Sarbananda Sonowal assure them for considering their demand sympathetically, but the govt. of Assam yet failed to come out with a clear cut policy on Gorkhas. As such a political convention was organised by the Gorkha organisations under GACDC on 10<sup>th</sup> February 2017 at Guwahati to accelerate their demand on the issue of NRC and OI after which the govt. representative assure them to send their demands to the Home Ministry, Govt. of India.

### III. FINDINGS

The Gorkhas are demanding for their due share and rights in India democratically as they have the historical existence in India since centuries back. They are able to achieve the goal partially. The Gorkhas of Darjeeling launched several movements including violent movement to get their separate state the Gorkhaland demand done. On the contrary, the other parts of Gorkhas including the Gorkhas of Assam adopted the policy of coordination and persuasion with the ruling government instead of confrontation to get their demand fulfilled.

### IV. CONCLUSION

While summing up the discussion it may be said that the Gorkhas have been struggling to place their community at par with other forwarded section of population. For this purpose, the Gorkha elite believed that certain constitutional status as indispensable. These included the recognised to them in the status of Schedule Tribe and Caste, facilities for the cultivation and conservation of Nepali language and culture, Gorkha autonomous state, Gorkhaland and so on.

### REFERENCES

- [1] The term „Gorkha“ is a debatable since there is dearth of unanimity among the scholars whether the Nepalese and Gorkhas are the same race community or not.
- [2] Reported in the „Asomiya“ (in Assam), May 31, 1947, cited in A. C. Bhuyan and S.P.De. (ed), *ibid*, p.320
- [3] Resolution of the Assam provincial Gurkha League adopted in its first Annual Conference held at Gauhati on December 31, 1946 and January 1, 1947
- [4] Assam Legislative Assembly Debate, Vol.1, No.5, 3rd April, 1951, p1220
- [5] The Nepali Castes viz. Thapa, Gurung, Lama, Mogor, Newar, Lohar, Domai, Gaine, Rai, Chetri, Limbu, Sarki i.e.cobbler were recognized as other backward class (Govt.of Assam personnel (B) Dept. Office Memorandum NO-A BP338/83/14dated 4/1/1984
- [6] Memorandum of the AGS submitted to the Government of India on July 24, 1968
- [7] The memorandum of the AANSU submitted to the Prime Minister New Delhi on July 24, 1980

- [8] Mention maybe made that the editorial board of "Jagrata Gorkha" a quarterly Nepali magazine consisting three members named Anand singh Thapa Birshingh Bhandari and Narendrasingha Rana submitted a memorandum to the president of India demanding inclusion of Nepali language into the constitution of India on January 18, 1956. The SMARIKA (SOUVENIR) of the 6th Annual Conference of the All India Nepali Bhasa Samiti held at Nalbari on December 28, 1986, p. 36- 37
- [9] Suniti Kumar Chatterjee, Language and Litaerature of modern India cited in Surya Das, Nepal, Nepali Aru

Nepali, (SOUVENIR) of 6th Annual conference of the AINBS held at Nalbari on December 28 1986, p. 65 10. Mention may be made that the AINBS has decided to observe August 20<sup>th</sup> as Nepali Language Victory Day every year since 1992 onward on which day the Parliament of India passed the 77th Constitutional Amendment Bill dealing with the constitutional reorganization of the Nepali language along with Manipuri and Konkani. (Reported in The Assam Tribune, September 20, 1992

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