

Ethnic Problems In Bhutan: Search For A New Way To Settlement

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Abstract: Ethnic identity has become a significant source of instability in a state like Bhutan. The main ethnic groups are –Ngalong, Sharchops, and the people of Nepali origin i.e. Lhotshampa. The Nepalese came to Bhutan initially in the early 1900s to collect timber from the forests and thereupon, gradually settled down and took to farming. To accommodate the Nepalese people into the Bhutanese mainstream population, they were first conferred citizenship of Bhutan in 1958, which gave them several rights as par with other communities of Bhutan.

The Bhutanese development programme led to the influx of Nepalese immigrants in the 1960's and 1970's. Bhutanese elite people were sure that the foreign ethnic groups would outnumber them and they could become a minority. This fear of the Bhutanese was strengthened by the merger of Sikkim with India in 1975 and Gorkhaland agitation led by the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) in Darjeeling Hills for a Nepali speaking state in the mid-1980s. Bhutan apprehended that the silent influx of Nepalese immigrants might create another Sikkim type of situation within Bhutan. The Bhutanese authorities initiated several initiatives like The Bhutan Citizenship Act of 1977 and 1985, the Marriage Act of 1980, the census conducted in 1988 base on the Citizenship Act of 1985 to identify illegal immigrants and the promulgation of Driglam-Nam-Za in 1989 to restrict Nepalese immigration into Bhutan.

As a result of those discriminations, the ethnic conflict was erupted between the Nepali origin people and Ngalong dominated government. The Government deployed the Royal Bhutan Army (RBA) through-out the Bhutan, which led to the exodus of the people of Nepali origin from the country in large number, estimated 108,897 Bhutanese of Nepali origin left Bhutan of which 98,897 people are living in eight refugee camps of eastern Nepal managed by the UNHCR and rest of the refugees are scattered throughout India and several European countries. To resolve this problem, several rounds of bilateral talks have taken place between Nepal and Bhutan, though they yet to come any final conclusion. Though Bhutan ranks first in Gross National Happiness, it cannot claim to be making the Bhutanese happy when thousands of their populations are living outside Bhutan in refugee camps in Nepal. Even the new Bhutan's constitution of 2008 neglected the every right of these Nepalese people. So if Bhutan aspires to be truly democratic, it should choose a path of reunion with the ethnic Nepalese inside and outside its borders. Otherwise this exclusion of large number of people may strengthen the hand of the militants. The continuation of this problem not only affected the Bhutan's relations with Nepal, but also with the other south Asian countries.

Keywords: Ngalong, Sharchops, Lhotshampa, merger of Sikkim, Gorkha National Liberation Front, Discriminations, Driglam-Nam-Za, Gross National Happiness.

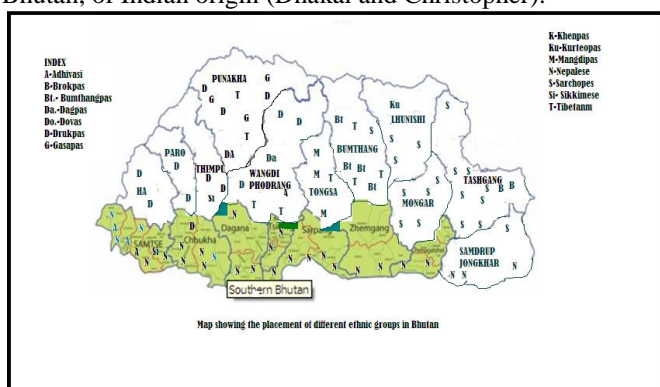
I. INTRODUCTION

Modernization, carried out by the modern state, is an unavoidable part of the process of nation-building. In a multi-ethnic context, nation building is none other than national integration or national unification. The centralization of political power and the restructuring of the life styles of the

various ethnic communities under the modern nation-state are necessary for this, which leads to necessary circumstances for the rise of ethnic nationalism. Ethno-nationalism originated as a reaction against excessive centralizing and homogenizing policies of the state trying to become a nation-state. The obvious fallout of ethno-nationalism is either secession, expulsion of disloyal minorities or genocide. 'Ethnicity' is a

concept, which has been, derived from the Greek word 'ethnos' which means nation, people, caste, tribe and the like. Ethnicity therefore stands for the ethnic quality or affiliation of a group and may come to bear different meanings under different situations. Thus we find that race, tribe, caste, class, language, dialects, religion, sect etc have all been used to demarcate ethnicity (Mahfuzul, 1997).

The process of nation-building has proved to be an uphill task for the elites of modern nations. Ethnic identity has become a significant source of instability in a modern state. To create a balance between ethnic identity and national identity with the right mixture of diversity of ethnic diacritics within a state has proved to be a challenging task. South Asia can be described as an ethnic mosaic which can be considered as the potential source of any future conflict based on ethnic identity rather than nationality. Bhutan is no exception to this environment. A country which was known for its peaceful serenity has become a cauldron of ethnic conflict. If one tries to examine the origin of the crisis he would find the roots in the every ethnic composition of Bhutan and the problem of assimilation arising from it. Bhutan presents a unique example of an ethnic crisis where the homogenizing attempts by the ruling monarchy created its alienation from its populace especially the Lhotshampas, one of the chief constituents of the ethnic population of Bhutan living in the southern part of the country. Bhutan, a land-locked state of 7, 52,693 people, is a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and multi-religious country in south Asia. The main ethnic groups are –Ngalop, Sharchops, Khengs, and the people of Nepali origin i.e. Lhotshampa comprise around 98% of the population of Bhutan. The other ethnic groups are Brokpas (anomadic community in central Bhutan, of Tibetan origin), Mons or Monpas, living in the east and southeast, considered themselves to be the oldest inhabitants), Khens (located in central Bhutan, with Indo-Mongoloid features),Birmis (anomadic group in the east), Lhops or Doyas (a tribe in the south west who claim to be aboriginal inhabitants), Lepchas (a very small community in the west, of Sikkimese or Indian-Nepali origin), Bodos (a community in the south) and Tephos (a group in north Bhutan, of Indian origin (Dhakal and Christopher).



Source: Ghosh., p. (2010): "Bhutanese Refugee: A Forgotten Saga", Minerva Associates Publications, Kolkata,

Figure 1

The Ngalong are of Tibetan origin, migrated to Bhutan as early as the ninth century. The term Ngalong literally means 'those risen earliest or converted first'. For this reason, they are often referred to in literature as "Bhote" (people of Bhutia/Bhotia or Tibet). The Ngalong are dominant in

western and northern Bhutan, including Thimphu and the Dzongkha-speaking region and constitute 28% of the population (Parmanand), Today the Ngalong provide and implement their own culture as the core value of the Bhutanese nation and also dominate the socio economic and political elite and decision making institutions of the country. The King's family belongs to this ethnic group.

The Sharchops (meaning "easterner"), live in the north and eastern part of the country and comprise of about 44% of the population(Parmanand), They are considered to be the original inhabitants of Bhutan belonging to the Indo-Mongoloid family.PG Although long the biggest ethnic group in Bhutan, the Sharchop have been largely assimilated into the Tibetan-Ngalop culture. Because of their proximity to India, some speak Assamese or Hindi. B.Sharchopes never had posed any problem to the ruling elite until recently when under Rongthong Kunley Dorji who formed the Druk national Congress that they started demanding for democratic reforms and ushering in of the constitutional Monarchy.

The third category and the most conspicuous of all and the cause of all concern are the Lhotshampas or Bhutanese of Nepalese origin. They during the beginning of the crisis constituted 25% to 28% of the population if one considers the claims of ethnic Nepalese themselves. But official estimates put the figure as low as 15% to 20%. (Parmanand,1992), Officially, the government stated that 28 percent of the national population was Nepalese in the late 1980s, but unofficial estimates ran as high as 30 to 40 percent, and Nepalese were estimated to constitute a majority in southern Bhutan. They are not homogenous group. They include cast groups like Bahun, Chhetri, Magar, Gurung, Raj, Limbu, Tamang, and Newer. Their religious beliefs include Hinduism, Buddhism and Shamanism. Despite these differences, they are bonds together by a common Nepali language and culture. The people of Nepali origin form the majority of the population in three main regions of southern Bhutan, which are follows :(i) the Western Bhutan or SAMCHI(Chamurchi) area which lies opposite the Western Doors of the Jalpaiguri district of West Bengal. This area comprises Sibus, Chamurchi/Chengmari and Denchuka/ Dorokha subdivisions; (ii) the "Eastern" or CHRANG area the Eastern Doors of the Gopalpara district of Assam, which encompasses Kalikhola, Jaigon, Sarbhanga/ Lapse Bhote, darang and Newoli sub-divissions; (iii) the "Central" area comprising mainly Tala and Dagana.(Mitra).

Before going into details of the present crisis, it is important here to discuss the history of the Nepalese settlement in the foothills of Bhutan. The dissidents of Nepali origin, however, claim the settlement of the Nepalese as much before the recorded history of the British or the government. They have cited that many Nepalese artisans from Kathmandu went to Bhutan to build monasteries. Among 108 monasteries built by them, Paro Kiyachu and Bumthag Jamphel Lakhags are the most significant. It is believed that these artisans settled in the valleys of eastern and central Bhutan.This source also claims that when Guru Padmasambhava came to Bhutan to preach Buddhism, he brought an entourage of Nepalis who later settled in Bhutan.The government sources confirm that "since the reign of Deb Minijier Tempa (1667-1680), Newari craftsmen who were renowned for their artistic skills in metal work were commissioned by Bhutan for execution of religious

objects and casting of statues."(Pattanaik). But there is no evidence of these people settling in Bhutan.

As per official records, the Lhotshampas are mostly the Nepali settlers who came to Bhutan after the conclusion of the Sinchula treaty of 1865 between British India and Bhutan bringing the end to the Duars wars (Upreti). This Treaty enabled the British to retain the possession of the entire strip of the Assam and Bengal Dooars (Rahul), opening the gates for Nepalese migration to southern Bhutan. Nepalese migrations to Bhutan are closely associated with the Bhutanese migration to Sikkim, Darjeeling and Dooars of Assam. Most of the Nepalese came to these areas as plantation workers or to work in various development projects undertaken by the British administration (Das). Moreover, as recorded in history, it was Kazi Ugyen Dorji, the Prime Minister of Bhutan, who was in charge of the southern foothills of Bhutan, who had encouraged the Nepalese settlement in Bhutan because of labour shortage (Thinley). The economic transformation brought about by the industrious Nepalese in Darjeeling and adjoining areas made Dorji employ the Nepalese for the twin purpose of development of southern Bhutan and to fulfill his commitment to pay annual rent to the central government in Bhutan. All these factors cumulatively, along with the reluctance of the Bhutanese to settle in the malarious, hot and humid part of southern Bhutan, led to the choice in favour of the Nepalese.

However, Nepalese immigration to sparsely populated southern Bhutan continued even later in pursuit of economic opportunities. Further, the implementation of the first 5-Year plan in 1961 needed a steady labour supply to fill in the labour shortage. This led Bhutan to recruit foreign skilled workers from India and Nepal. In 1995 the non-national workers were estimated to be 30,000 including 10,000 Nepalese ethnic people (Ghosh). Non-national labour forces have been a feature in development plans of Bhutan. Without their active participation, development work and modernization of Bhutan would have been impossible. In spite of their presence in Bhutan for more than a century; the Nepalese have maintained their unique tradition and culture. This is because the identity of the Nepalese as a distinct ethnic group stems from the fact that they belong to a different religious, lingual and socio-cultural group.

Indian freedom movement culminating in the departure of the British and creation of two successor states of Indian union and Pakistan enthused the democratic elements within Bhutan. At the same time Anti Rana movement and the subsequent formation of political parties in Nepal inspired D.B. Gurung to organize the country's first political parties the Bhutan State congress in 1952. However, it brought a popular agitational programme fighting for civil and political rights, abolition of landed estates, establishment of a responsible government etc was thwarted by the despotic monarchy. The monarchy banned all sorts of political agitation on the Bhutanese soil. However, the failed political agitation became eye-opener and persistent demand for democratic reforms in Bhutan forced King Jigme Dorji Wangchuk to tackle the situation by introducing representation of Nepalese in the National Assembly and their appointment to the Royal Civil Service. Further he conferred citizenship rights to the Nepalese under the Nationality Act of 1958.

II. NATIONALITY ACT OF 1958

By this Act govt. attempted to define Bhutanese citizenship. Certain requirements had to be fulfilled if a person was to be recognized as a Bhutanese citizen:

They were:

- ✓ If his/her father was a Bhutanese national and was a resident of Bhutan.
- ✓ If any person was born within Bhutan or outside Bhutan after the commencement of this law, provided the previous father was a Bhutanese national at the time of his/her birth.
- ✓ If any foreigner who had the age of majority and was otherwise eligible, he could be granted citizenship after administering oath of loyalty according to the rules laid down provided that:
 - The person was a resident of Bhutan for more than ten years, and
 - Owned land within the kingdom.
- ✓ A woman married to a Bhutanese national was granted citizenship after oath as laid down by law.
- ✓ If a foreigner submitted a petition to the king expressing his eligibility on the ground of age requirements, had served satisfactorily in govt. at least five years, and had been resident in Bhutan for at least ten years he might receive the citizenship certificate(Khanal).

The Act required the Nepalese to submit a bond of agreement, which will affirm their allegiance to the King. This meant an emotional integration with the mainstream Drukpa community by adhering to their socio-cultural norms and accepting the Drukpas politico-economic superiority. Citizenship rights to the Lhotshampas not only gave them legitimacy but conferred on them political and economic rights at par with other communities of Bhutan. Any aversion to this would be met by stringent punishments. This was targeted at the Nepalese and the Indian settlers in Bhutan. But at the outset this act tried to identify and delineate only the illegal Nepalese immigrants and not the Lhotshampas.

Bhutanese government, by giving the representation right to the Nepalese at the National Assembly (Tshogdu), included them in the decision making process. The southern Bhutanese were represented in the Bhutanese civil services as par with the ethnic Bhutanese and were free to study in their mother tongue and teaching was imparted in Nepali. The Nepalese were also taken in the Army and police and were included in the Cabinet and judiciary (Sinha). There was no restriction on the Nepalese to open pathsalas to learn Sanskrit or to celebrate Hindu religious holidays and maintain their culture, tradition and wear their unique dress.

At the beginning of the 1960s, as a part of Bhutan's Five Years Plan, the King announced many development programmes and plans. Free education, free health services, employment opportunities, highly subsidized agriculture inputs, generous rural credit schemes, the security of a politically stable country were the main inducements that led to the influx of Nepalese immigrants in the 1960's and 1970's. Bhutanese elite people were sure that the foreign ethnic groups would outnumber them and they could become a minority. This fear of the Bhutanese was strengthened by the

merger of Sikkim with India in 1975 and the Gorkhaland agitation led by the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) in Darjeeling Hills for a Nepali speaking state in the mid-1980s influenced the thinking of the Bhutanese elite. Of these, the experience of Sikkim had a lasting impact on the Bhutanese psyche. During this period, the influx of Hindu Nepalese into Sikkim resulted in the original inhabitants, i.e. Mahayana Buddhists, becoming a minority. Finally, with the help of the majority of Nepalese in Sikkim, the ruler of Sikkim the Chogyal was removed from power and Sikkim became part of India. After the merger of Sikkim into Indian Union, Bhutan apprehended that the silent influx of Nepalese immigrants might create another Sikkim type of situation within Bhutan, if preventive measures were not taken immediately. The experience of the struggle against illegal immigrants in Assam by the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) and the Assam Gana Sangram Parisad (AGSP) were helpful for the Bhutanese authorities to evolve suitable measures to deal with the people of Nepali origin in Bhutan. The Bhutan Citizenship Act of 1977 and 1985, the Marriage Act of 1980, the census conducted in 1988 based on the Citizenship Act of 1985 to identify illegal immigrants and the promulgation of Driglam-Nam-Za in 1989 testify to this.

III. CITIZENSHIP ACT OF 1977 & 1985

The Bhutanese Citizenship Act of 1977, which was only a modification of Nationality Law of Bhutan of 1958, attached citizenship to marriage and ownership of property in Bhutan. The Bhutan Citizenship Act of 1985, which was again a modified version of the Citizenship Act of 1977, made people who were not residents of Bhutan on or before 31 December 1958 illegal immigrants. Apart from this, knowledge of culture, customs, traditions, national language (Dzongkha) and the history of Bhutan were made the basic requirements to get citizenship in Bhutan (Ministry of Home Affairs, May, 1993). The possibilities of getting citizenship in Bhutan became very difficult due to the enactment of this act.

IV. MARRIAGE ACT OF 1980

Keeping in mind the relations resulting from marriages between the Nepalese on either side of the international boundary which encourages further immigration, the government introduced the Marriage Act, 1980, restricting marriage with non-Bhutanese by laying down certain penalties in terms of promotion and other benefits. It is important to mention here that earlier, to encourage inter-ethnic marriages between Drukpas and Lhotshampas, the government which had announced a cash reward of Nu 5,000 increased to Nu 10,000 if the marriage lasted for five years (Sixty-Eighth National Assembly Debates, 1987) But this policy failed to achieve the anticipated results due to various socio-religious constraints which prescribe the marital relationship within the Nepalese community. Thus, the Marriage Act was largely resented by the Lhotshampas because it affected them. One of the provisions of this Act stated: "Promotion shall not be granted to a Bhutanese citizen married to a non-Bhutanese

beyond the post she/he held at the time of his/her marriage." This provision had a retrospective effect of being effective from June 11, 1977. Such a person shall not be promoted beyond the post of a sub divisional officer. Moreover, any Bhutanese citizen employed in the National Defense Department or in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs shall be removed from such services after his/her marriage to a non-Bhutanese. They shall not get facilities enjoyed by other citizens. Moreover, they are not entitled to education or training abroad. However, later it was clarified by His Majesty that a non-national spouse "would be granted special residential permit and would be entitled to health, education, and other social benefits extended to the citizen of the country." (Sixty-Seventh National Assembly Debates, Nov. 21, 1998). The grant of special residence permit is limited to marriages prior to the coming into force of the 1985 Act and not to those which took place thereafter so as to prevent anybody adopting the method of marriage as a means to migrate. This was perceived by the Lhotshampas as a move to prevent them from getting married outside the international boundary.

V. CENSUS OF 1988

The current ethnic crisis became visible after the census conducted in 1988 to identify the illegal immigrants on the basis of Citizenship Act of 1985. The 1988 census was taken only in the five southern districts of Bhutan, which sent shock waves to the ruling elites of Bhutan. The census result of Samchi district in southern Bhutan revealed that its population had almost doubled within a period of ten years. The census team divided the people into seven (F1-F7) categories. 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)
- 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) (AMCC, Sept. 1995).

The basis of ascertaining citizenship was "any documentary evidence whatsoever (land ownership deeds or document showing sale/gift/inheritance of land, tax receipt of any kind, etc.) showing that the person concerned was a resident in Bhutan in 1958 and is taken as a conclusive proof of citizenship." (Sixteenth National Assembly Debates, 1961). Thus, people who had been residing in Bhutan for generations were declared illegal immigrants because of non-possession of such documents. There is a possibility of many people not having tax receipts because there was a system of paying tax in kind. Many people who live in Bhutan do not own land, because due to the government's policy, many southern Bhutanese known as Sukumbis were given land and settled in 1970. (See Thirty-Second National Assembly Debates, spring 1970). These people could not prove their residency before 1958. From the above discussion it is clear that, this census

made a majority of the Lhotshampas fall in the categories of illegal immigrants except the people who belong to the category F1 (people with land tax receipt of 1958 or before). Even people in the F1 category were also evicted, as they were accused of being "anti nationals" of relatives of "anti nationals". All the above reasons were enough to ignite the growing disillusion and dissatisfaction of the Nepalese towards the Royal Government.

The 1988 Census revealed quite shocking figures, because, it showed a sharp rise of the ethnic Nepalese population to about 40% with the Sharchopes comprising about 31% and the ruling Nagalops of West Bhutan at about 16%. Pattanaik, Smruti S, (2016). But the official estimates of Bhutan show a clear disparity. But as per official figures of Bhutan, the nagalops at about 20%, Sharchops at 37% and Nepali speakers at about 30 % (Lee. Tang.L, 1998), which showed a clear disparity from the previous one. The main reason to underplay the actual figures of ethnic composition was the rising numbers of Lhotshampas made the Bhutanese Govt. worried. The fear was also corroborated by the high birth rate of the Lhotshampas. The rate of population growth of the southerner is 2.8% as against less than 2% of the rest (Lee & Tang). From the above discussion it is quite evident that due to high birth rate and unbridled migration, the Lhotshampas have soon come to constitute a large segment of the Bhutanese population. But they have been long denied of a fair share in the political and social life of the country. This disparity created discontent in their minds. As reported in Nepalese newspapers, according to the 1981 census, 53 percent of Bhutan's populations are of Nepali origin. They are treated as second class citizens of the nation (Adhikary). They possess much great political awareness and good education, and more modernized in comparison with their Drukpa counterparts." Nevertheless they are denied high positions in the civil bureaucracy the Royal Bhutanese army, the Royal Bhutanese police and the Royal Advisory Council and the National Assembly. They are also under-represented in the fields of agriculture, education and industry.

Bhutan's identity is centered on the institutions of monarchy and the Drukpa Kagyuppa sect of Mahayana Buddhism. It is considered that the central and western regions of the country are the home of the authentic Bhutanese culture. Hence the cultural practices of these areas are projected as the national ones. The other ethnic groups are accorded a status in the periphery of the Bhutanese national culture. By the end of 1980s, the government had become acutely conscious not just of widespread illegal immigration of people of Nepali origin into Bhutan, but also of the total lack of integration even of long-term immigrants into the political and cultural mainstream of the country. Most Lhotshampa remained culturally Nepalese. In a bid to assimilate the Lhotshampas, many measures were undertaken. In 1988, the programme started with the concept of "one nation one people." As a part of this policy, Govt. of Bhutan introduced 'Driglam Nam Za'. Along with other practices the govt. incorporated a dress code with this code of social etiquette (Driglam Nam Za).While applicable only on formal occasions, in practice it was required to be worn everywhere "except by the Bhutanese operating modern machinery in workshops, factories, etc., where the use of Kho was inadvisable. Any person violating

this rule was to be arrested and was liable to imprisonment." (Times of India, March 21, 1990). This dress code was not acceptable to the Lhotshampas because it was inconvenient for them to wear in the hot and humid weather of the Terai region. Moreover the material used for making this dress was quite expensive. It was not that the representatives of the Lhotshampas in the National Assembly did not ventilate the reluctance of the people to abide by the dress code. But the government did not pay any attention to their opinion. If the dress code is not followed, there is fine of Nu 500 for the first offence, Nu 1000 for the second and rigorous imprisonment if the same offender is caught for the third time. (Royal Civil Service Commission, November 1, 1995).

The government took measures to strengthen the use of Dzongkha. Moreover to reduce the use of Nepali, the teaching of Nepali in the southern Bhutan schools were stopped in 1988. Text-books were prepared by the Department of Education to educate people in the national language and adequate grace marks were given for the students of southern Bhutan in Dzongkha. The government, however, maintains that until 1988, Nepali was being taught up to grade five in all the primary schools in the south as a third language and not as a medium of instruction. In the National Assembly there is no proportional representation for the ethnic Nepalese. In a 151-member National Assembly, the southern Bhutanese have only 16 representatives and only one of them is serving as a Cabinet Minister. In the civil services, the northern Bhutanese constitute 73.50 per cent and the southern Bhutanese 26.50 per cent.

As natural consequences of above mentioned discriminations, the ethnic conflict was erupted between the Nepali origin people and Ngalong dominated government. The ethnic conflict has also been developed into a movement for the democratisation of the Bhutanese polity and society. Different political and human rights organization were formed in protest of the different discriminatory policies of the Government. The first organization which came into being was the People's Forum for Human Rights, Bhutan, formed on July 7, 1989 under the leadership of Tek nath Rizal, a former royal advisory council member of Nepali origin. The activities of PFHRB created panic among the Bhutanese ruling elite. The Bhutan People's party (BPP) was formed on June 2, 1990 at Gardanga tea estate in Siliguri, West Bengal. According to the manifesto of the BPP, it stands for democracy, parliamentary system of government, constitutional monarchy and multiparty system in Bhutan. The BPP organized series of demonstrations through-out southern Bhutan during September-October 1990. The Bhutan Students Union and the Bhutan Aid Group-Nepal also were involved in political activism.. The government tried to suppress the wave of discontent through different measures. A new term, 'Ngolops' (anti nationals or terrorists) was coined to describe the agitator. The Government deployed the Royal Bhutan Army (RBA) through-out the Bhutan, which led to the exodus of the people of Nepali origin from the country in large number. At present according to the provisional statistics on refugees released by UNHCR in April, 2001, there were approximately a total 108897 Bhutanese Refugees of whom UNHCR had assisted 98897 in its 8 camps in Eastern Nepal (Khrat, 2004).

Bhutanese refugee camps in Eastern Nepal:



Source: <http://geocurrentscommunity.blogspot.in/2010/12/bipolar-kingdom-of-bhutan-bhutan.html>

Figure 2

To resolve this problem, several rounds of bilateral talks have taken place between Nepal and Bhutan, though they yet to come any final conclusion. As of July 2011, the governments of Bhutan and Nepal had held at least 15 rounds bilateral talks, with no practical solution reached; although Bhutanese state media echoed Bhutan's insistence on continued talks with Nepal, it has signaled its preference for third-country resettlement. The U.S. offered to resettle 60,000 of the 107,000 Bhutanese refugees of Nepalese origin then living in seven U.N. refugee camps in southeastern Nepal, and began receiving this group in 2008. Five other nations — Australia, Canada, Norway, Netherlands and Denmark — also offered to resettle 10,000 each. New Zealand offered to settle 600 refugees over a period of five years starting in 2008. By January 2009, more than 8,000 Bhutanese refugees were resettled in various countries. As of November 2010, more than 40,000 Bhutanese refugees were resettled in various countries. Canada offered to accept 6,500 Bhutanese refugees by the end of 2014. Other countries also operate resettlement programs in the camps. Norway has already settled 200 Bhutanese refugees, and Canada has agreed to accept up to 5000 through to 2012 (Kuensel, 2011).

VI. CONCLUSION

Though Bhutan ranks first in Gross National Happiness, it cannot claim to be making the Bhutanese happy when thousands of their populations are living outside Bhutan in refugee camps in Nepal. Present democratic reforms and adoption of a new constitution of 2008, are nothing but the reflections of demands by Lhotshampas. However, neither the Lhotshampas have been given rights and freedoms under the new constitution, nor those evicted from Bhutan have been allowed to return Bhutan. If Bhutan aspires to be truly democratic, it should choose a path of reunion with the ethnic Nepalese inside and outside its borders. Otherwise this exclusion of large number of people may strengthen the hand of the militants. The continuation of this problem not only affected the Bhutan's relations with Nepal, but also with the other south Asian countries. If Bhutan solves this problem properly, it would be setting a good example for other countries suffering from a similar ethnic crisis. This requires a lot of soul searching a long term approach and statesmanship on the part of the Bhutanese rulers. Bhutan has to look into the problem realistically and has to be more accommodative and sympathetic in its approach towards this problem. Any tough stand on its part will provide only temporary relief. The hundreds and thousands of refugees in the neighboring country, who have many grievances against the government, might be led to align with terrorist groups operating in this part which will compound a major security threat to the country and the ruling elites. Bhutan might have to introduce both the Nepali and Dzongkha languages as state languages and ought to allow the Nepalese to share in the economic diplomatic process and also to share the benefits.

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