

অসম কলেজ শিক্ষক সংস্থা
১৬ নং ধুবুৰী নগৰ
৮ নং বাৰ্ষিক অধিবেশন

স্মৃতিগ্ৰন্থ



প্রমথেশ বৰুৱা মহাবিদ্যালয় শিক্ষক সংস্থা
গৌৰীপুৰ। ধুবুৰী। অসম।

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Smritigrantha : A collection of critical writings on Education literature, Language, Culture and Contemporary issues on the occasion of ACTA Zone-16, Dhubri Zonal Conference, 2022, edited by Dr. Akhtarul Islam on behalf of Pramathesh Barua College Teachers Association.

Publication : December, 2022

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Cover Page designed by : Suman Dutta & Raju Paul

Published by : Pramathesh Barua College Teachers Association,
Gauripur, Dhubri

Printed by : Ansha Printing Point, Gauripur

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Gorkha community, culture and their issues in Assam

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Assam is a land of preeminence since ancient times due to its richness in natural beauty, resources and in assimilation of cultural diversities of Austric, Tibeto-Burman, Dravidian and Nordic (Arya) origin in the past. Varieties of ethnic communities, integrated cultural and religious diversities are the reasons for the richness and beauty of the state. It can be best recognized as mini-India where people from different community live.

Introduction : Like other communities such as Ahom, Boro, Karbi, Mising, Rabha and so on, the importance of Assamese Gorkhas cannot be denied. The word Gorkha (or Gurkha) has been derived from the 8th-century Hindu warrior-saint Guru Gorakhnath. Gorkhas are generally Nepali-origin people. There are number of sub-communities in Gorkha community namely Bahun (Brahmans), Chetry, Rai, Limbu, Newar, Magar, Sherpa, Gurungs, Tamang, Kami, Domai, Sarki etc. Though they have distinct culture, customs and different languages but they all identify themselves as Nepali or Gorkhali. Among these, Bahun (Bramins), Chetry, Kami, Damai, Sarki and Thakuri etc are Khas parbatiya. Tamang, Gurung, Magar, Newar are Tibeto-ethnic group whereas Rai, Limbu and Subba etc are Kirat people.

Historical Perspective : From the ethnological point of view, Gorkhas are divided into three groups. First group is

known as Kiratas. The linguistic Survey of India states that 'Kiratas' among Vedic Aryans are the Tibeto-Burman speaking Mongoloids with yellow complexion. The presence of Kirat is found through literacy evidence by about 1000 BC. In the Mahabharata, the historical core of which probably goes back to the 10th century BC, there are suggestions that the Sino-Tibetans or Kiratas belong to the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam (Bhandari 2003). Kiratas were the earliest inhabitants of the land and were traditionally hill-men ethnologically closer to the north-eastern tribes of India (Sinha, 1990). Secondly, some scholars like Srikanth Dutt, A C Sinha, T B Subba, Lopita Nath, Lokraj Baral, B C Upreti, etc, found that there were marital relationships between the people of Nepal and Assam from the period of Harsha-Varmadeva (730-750 AD). The two Kamrup kings Nidhwaj and Narayan had married the princess of Nepal in 1520 (Subba, 2003). Thirdly, the real immigration of Gorkhas in Assam began in 1817 (to be exact), when Gorkhas were deployed in the Sylhet operation (Shakespeare, 1977) and especially after the treaty of Sugauli in 1816 between British India and Nepal (Sarmah, 2020). Later on, Gorkha herdsmen and marginal farmers came in great numbers from the 1920s. Demography: 2.5 million (25 lakh) people from the Gorkha community are living in Assam presently (NDTV, 2019 during NRC discussion). According to the census of India 2011, almost 5,96,210 Gorkha people live in Assam which is 1.91% of the total population of Assam.

The figure 1 shows that the population of Gorkhas in Assam has not been increased significantly as compared to the net change in population of Assam. It clearly means that the population of Gorkhas in Assam is rising slowly and has not been increased so much over the years as compared to the increase in the population of Assam. This is because of their

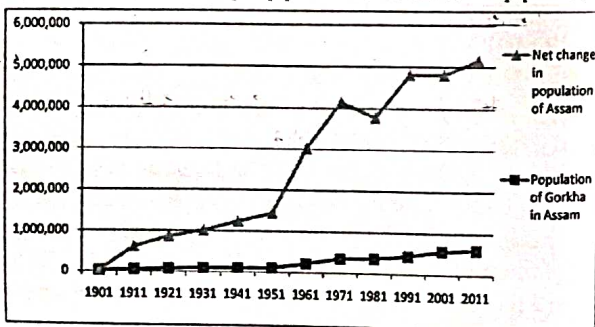
consciousness, awareness, education of the people and most importantly their future preparation for happy family life. They would like to have fewer children and understand the obligations towards their children and believe in modernization.

Table 1: Population of Gorkha Community in Assam since 1991

Year	Gorkha population in Assam	Percentage
1901	21,347	0.35
1911	47,654	0.67
1921	70,344	0.94
1931	88,306	1.02
1941	99,363	1.07
1951	101,338	1.26
1961	215,213	1.98
1971	349,116	2.38
1981	360,628	1.96
1991	432,519	1.93
2001	564,790	2.30
2011	596,210	1.91

Source: Census Reports of India

Figure 1: showing the net change in population of Assam and Gorkha population



Source: Census Reports of India

Occupancy : Gorkha people generally live in hilly areas and graziers land in Assam since they are arduous, hard working and self-reliant. Retired IAS, Sri D.B Chetry writes in a book entitled History and Culture of Assamese Nepali, "though no documentary evidence is available on the history of graziers of Kaziranga, it is believed that most of the Nepali settlers in the Brahmaputra valley had their Khutis (cattle farms) in Kaziranga Reserve". The largest population of Gorkhas lives in sonitpur district which is 131,261 (7.81% of the total population), Tinsukia - 87,850 (7.64%), Karbi Anglong - 46,871 (5.76%) and Baksa (2.42%). Tehsils with the largest proportion of Gorkha people are in Sadiya (27.51%), Na Duar (16.39%), Helem (15.43%), Margherita (13.10%), and Umrangso (12.37%).

Language : The Gorkhas use Assamese as a lingua franca even though they speak Nepali, a language of Indo-Aryan family which has its origin from Sanskrit Dialect. On 20 August, 1992 'Nepali or Gorkhali' Language was included in the Eight Schedule of the Indian Constitution. Anand Singh Thapa of Darjeeling raised the first official demand regarding the recognition of Nepali Language in the Indian Constitution on January 18, 1956. The Assamese Gorkha in Assam accepted Assamese as the state language and medium of instruction. Many Gorkha people joined in the language movement voluntarily during the 1960s. Thus, they in Assam not only wholeheartedly supported Assamese as the State language but also accepted it as vernacular in the schools. The Gorkha students studying in Assamese schools have Assamese as their vernacular. Having adopted the Assamese language the section of the educated and conscious Gorkha people took an active interest in spreading education in different parts of the state including the hill districts. For instance, the Behali High School

in Sonitpur district was set up in 1943 under the superb leadership of noted freedom fighter late Chhabilal Upadhyay with total initiative and hard labour of the Gorkha elite of the locality (Sarmah, 2020).

Religion: Most of the Gorkha people like Bramins, Chetry, Karni and so on follow the Hindu or Sanatan Religion. But some Gorkhas such as Lama, Tamang and so on adopted Bhudhism. Some Gorkha like Rai, Limbu and Subba recognized themselves as Kirat or follows Kirat religion.

Traditional Dress: Gorkha community is rich in culture. They use to wear traditional costumes even on day to day basis. Gorkha men generally wear Bhoto, Daura-Suruwal and Dhaka Topi (cap) while women wear Sari and Cholo.



Festivals: Gorkha people have been influenced by and have always been core of Nepali or Gorkhali Culture. Dashain Festival is known as the most important festival among the Gorkha people in Assam. It is celebrated in the months of October and November starts before the Durga puja. Before Durga puja, Gorkha people remember and give homage to the ancestors. This is Called "Sorah Sradh" (Sixteen-day obsequies of ancestors). After this, they worship Durga (God) nine days called "Nab Ratri" (Nabah-Durga Puja) and take 'Tika' of red-coloured rice and 'Yamara' as a holy Prasad on the forehead

starting from the "Bijaya Dasomi". During the Dashain festival, all the relatives get together and take blessings from seniors and elders. It is also known for its festive mood and joyful moments. This Dashain festival lasts till Laxmi puja on the day of Purnima. 'Tihar' or 'Deepawali Festival' is one of the prominent festivals of Gorkha Community. It is held in the month of November. It is the festival of lights, colors, decorations, and fancy sweets. Tihar is the festival of 5 days- whereas the first is known as 'Kak Tihar'(day of bird crow); second day is 'Kukur Tihar' (dog puja); third day is 'Ousi ko Din' (Goddess Laxmi Puja); fourth day is 'Govardhan Puja' and the fifth day is known as Bhai-tika, where brothers and sisters exchange 'Tika', 'Pakwans' and 'Gifts'. So, it is also known as Bhai Tika or Bhai Dhuj. On the day of Bhai Tika, sisters and brothers get together and accept tika from each other. During this Tihar festival, various sweets, food and "Sel Roti" are prepared. People call their friends of different communities and serve them foods. On the day of Laxmi Puja, people worship cow. The young boys and girls participate in group dance called "Deusi" (for men) and "Bhoili" (for women). The main reason of folk dances of "Deusi-Bhoili" reflects on the following line of 'Deusi' chants-

"Haami afui aayeka hoinau, Bali Rajale pothayeka"

This means 'we haven't come falsely, king Bali has sent us'. Mythology has linked with this tradition to the king Bali.

Now-a-days, Tihar festival is performed on the stages with the name "Tihar Samaroh" in everywhere to preserve the culture. Third important festival is "Teej" which is the festival of womanhood. It is held in the month of August/September. The women celebrate Teej festival. They sing folk-song and dance and have draped themselves in red saaris recalling the heavenly occasion when Parvati, daughter of the Himalaya,

won the hand of Lord Shiva after long meditation and fasting. On the first day of Teej, people call their daughters to their homes; give them gifts; prepared a special food called "Dor" and groups of women gather together to celebrate the sacred feast. On the very next day, every woman gathers together; goes to river to take bath and to worship Shiva (God) together to have a happy and productive long life ahead for their husbands. Similarly some other important festivals are 'Maghe Sankranti', 'Fagu Purnima', 'Ashar ko Pandra', 'Thuli Ekadashi' and so on.

Ornaments : 'Tilhari', 'Nau Gedi potey', 'Bulaki', 'Kantha', 'Hansuli', 'Lalupatey headdress', 'Thaili' are some examples of ornaments and accessories. 'Tilhari' is the symbol of married women in Gorkha society. Gorkha women wear 'Tilhari' with beads of different colours.

Weapon : Gorkha community is known for valour and courage in respect of protecting Indian territory from foreign threat. Once Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw said about the Gorkha, "if a man says he is not afraid of dying, he is either lying or he must be a Gorkha". A large numbers of Gorkha Military participated in the First and Second World War and received many gallantry awards. It proves how courageous and daring the Gorkhas are in wars! To symbolize this courage, 'Khukri' is the main weapon associated with Gorkha. The Khukri is the most commonly used in household purpose. It is used in grazing fields also. Its use has varied from building, clearing, chopping firewood, digging, slaughtering animals for food, cutting meat and vegetables, skinning animals, and opening cans (Latter, 2013). The Khukri is in standard service with various regiments and units within the Indian Army, such as the Assam Rifles, the Kumaon Regiment, the Garhwal Rifles and the various Gorkha regiments (Dutta, 2019).

Livelihood: Though Gorkha people are mainly dependent on agriculture along with cattle farming for their livelihood since centuries. Gorkha people are peace loving who believes in self-reliant. They do hard work to earn their livelihood. They (Gorkha youths) dream to be a military persons to fight for own country and accept a courageous death. But some youths go to other cities of India such as Mumbai, Bangalore, Chennai and so on for seeking jobs these days due to unavailability of employment in Assam

The Gorkha people of Assam faced a lot of problem after independence. Identity crisis is the main such problem not only for the Gorkhas of Assam but all over India. Even after showing so many sacrifices starting from the freedom movement to protecting the territory of India in wars, from Language Movement to Assam Movement, they faced many problems and identity crisis in Assam. To protect the rights of Gorkha people, several organizations like AAGSU (All Assam Gorkha Student Union), AGS (Assam Gorkha Sammelan), AANSS (All Assam Nepali Sahitya Sabha) etc. were formed and carried out several movements. To fulfill the demands of the Gorkhas of Assam under the banner of organizations such as Assam Gorkha Sammelan (AGS), 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, Gorkha Autonomous Council and so on.

Despite the various issues and problems of Gorkha community, the Gorkhas of Assam have been an indispensable part of the Assamese society. Maheshwar Neog in his presidential Address of the Assam Sahitya Sabha at Mongoldoi

in 1974 said for all practical purposes the Gorkhas are Assamese. They not only played a key role in protecting the frontiers of the country and Assam, but also contributed to every spheres of the Assamese society be it agriculture, farming, literature, language, culture, religion and so on.

As such, Gorkha community is an integral part of Assam. Gorkha people always believe in the theme of 'Greater Assam' (Bor Asom) established by Saulung Sukafa and Mahapurush Shrimanta Sankardev for the peace and unification of the Assam and its diversities of people. And the most importantly Gorkhas are pacifists and always believe in the motto of "Live and let live". ■

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