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Abstract

This paper explores the role of periodicals in shaping the cultural and socio-political narratives of the Indian Nepali community, focusing on publications that emerged in the Darjeeling region from the early to mid-twentieth century. It investigates how print culture facilitated the creation of a public sphere, enabling the Indian Nepali community to imagine itself as a cohesive entity despite its diverse ethnic and linguistic roots. By examining the significance of Darjeeling as a dynamic contact zone and the backdrop for movements like the Gorkhaland movement (1980) and the linguistic movement (1992), the study highlights the region's pivotal role in fostering cultural exchange and discourse. It delves into the transformation of a society rooted in oral traditions to one unified through print literacy in a shared language, emphasizing the periodicals' impact on the evolving Nepali identity. The paper also addresses the nuances of readership and the engagement of these periodicals with modernity, offering insights into how they shaped the socio-cultural fabric and nationalism of Nepali society in India and beyond.

Keywords: *Print culture, Public sphere, Periodicals, Indian Nepali nationalism, Imagined community, Contact zone*

The concept of a nation and the modern nation-state exists within the bounds of a given territory wherein its sovereignty, authority, and legitimacy within that territory are considered absolute. While it can foster unity and solidarity, it can also lead to exclusion and conflict. The establishment of clear borders and the creation of the sovereign state as representing a distinct and shared identity, therefore, problematizes questions of belonging and identity. It further raises questions about the permeability of borders, contact zones- areas where different cultures and communities interact and influence each other- and the fluid and dynamic nature of national identity, shaped by historical events, migration, globalization, and internal changes. It is within this complex discourse of nation-state, belonging and identity that the question of the formation of the Nepali *jāti* in India must be analyzed and understood. To understand the early narratives within the public sphere, that inevitably shaped Nepali society and Nepali nationalism in India, this paper closely examines periodicals, a source which greatly acts as a mirror of its times, and investigates the extent to which these periodicals attempted to shape the cultural narratives and discourses of the Nepalis in India. To Borrow Anderson's idea, this is a study of the role of print in the creation of the space within which the Indian Nepali community could be

imagined. Though Banaras is the locus where the Nepali print culture established its foundation, this study lays its thrust on the periodicals that emerged from the Darjeeling region. Nestled in the lap of the Himalayas, the region serves as vibrant contact zone and melting pot of diverse ethnic groups, each contributing to the rich tapestry of cultural exchange. Home to movements such as the ‘Bhâsâ ndolan’ (Linguistic Movement) of 1992, and the Gorkhaland Movement of 1980, Darjeeling is an important site in the history of Nepali Nationalism, that was borne out of the growing consciousness amongst the Nepalis in India. However, this journey that involved numerous cultural, social, and political developments, which not only led to forging of a cohesive sense of Nepali identity, but culminated in strong regional and nationalistic expressions, was a complex one. Hence, this paper closely examines the periodical landscape in Darjeeling, starting from the early to the mid-twentieth century, and their significance in shaping the socio-cultural narratives of the Nepali society in India and beyond. It explores the intricacies of a society that evolved from culturally and linguistically diverse ethnic groups with oral traditions to one characterized by print literacy in a shared language. It delves into the various nuances within the context of readership, concerning periodicals as a modern form of publication, in the Nepali society and investigates the emerging narratives in their encounter with modernity.

Early Beginnings

The growth of the publishing industry in Banaras and participation in a shared print culture resulted in the emergence of a discursive space. The world of print enabled the use of this discursive space and led to formations of popular opinions and stimulated public debates. The first Nepali periodical, *Gorkhay Bhārat Jīwan*¹, was published in Benaras and subsequently *Mādhavi*, *Sundari*, *Gorkhāli*, *Chandra*, and others emerged from the city. In fact, Bhagyamani Bhikshacharya, the father of Parasmani Pradhan- a key figure in the advancement of Nepali language and literature- had once left Nepal to seek knowledge in Banaras. He was asked by Pandit Biswaraj Harihar, the owner of Durga Press, where he worked at the time, to travel to Darjeeling to sell copies of the freshly printed Bhanubhakta’s *Ramayana*. He travelled to Siliguri, Kurseong, Nagari Kaman, fulfilling his duty, and finally reached Kalimpong and settled there. This serves as an early example of the bridge between Banaras and Darjeeling, in Darjeeling’s exposure to Nepali print culture. Banaras, therefore, was the site where the foundations for the development of Nepali language and literature were laid. These discourses were consequently adopted by periodicals emerging in Dehradun, Assam, other parts of India, and most importantly Darjeeling, an emotional heartland for the Nepali community in India, which became an important site for the rhetoric of development of the Nepali *jāti*. Parasmani, undoubtedly must have had the opportunity to read the Banaras-based Nepali periodicals, which inspired him to write his first poem ‘Samasyāpurti’. He also contributed several writings to these periodicals and derived inspiration to begin his own periodicals in Darjeeling. He started *Chandrikā*, from Kurseong in 1918, and served as its editor. Though it only ran for a year, *Chandrikā* was the first literary periodical to

emerge from Darjeeling, thus making Parasmani, the first in the region to have had a literary aim in mind. He later stated that the goal of *Chandrikā* was 'to bring about *unnati* of the Nepali language and uniformity in language.'² However, preceding *Chandrikā* was *Gorkhay Khabar Kāgat*, the first periodical to emerge from Darjeeling in 1901. Unlike *Chandrikā*, *Gorkhay Khabar Kāgat*, was not influenced by the literary traditions of Banaras but was instead a product of colonial and missionary efforts. Started and sustained by an early convert (Christian priest), Ganga Prasad Pradhan, which ran for twenty-nine years (1901-1930), the periodical limited its aim to spreading Christianity amongst the Nepali masses. However, its contribution cannot be overlooked, as it reflects the state of the Nepali language and literature of the contemporary society. Parasmani's 'Gazal', along with few original works, translations and stories were published in *Gorkhay Khabar Kāgat*.³ The periodical in a way, helped in cultivating literary interest and reading habit in a freshly budding society in the region. As the print landscape evolved, engagement with discourses surrounding identity gradually gained momentum and became even more pronounced in Darjeeling because unlike Benaras, Darjeeling's Nepali community was far more ethnically diverse and contained a large number of Non-Brahmanical educated populace. By the second decade of the twentieth century, the Nepali society had begun to emerge out of its pre-literate state to a literate and progressively modern one.

As the educated lot acquired the knowledge of the social, cultural, economic and political life of the rest of India and the world, they became aware of the importance of one's language, literature, culture and identity. This newly created middle class was engaged in various socio-political reforms and often engaged in pedagogical missions, in the need to strengthen the social, cultural, and economic fabric of the Nepali community in India. A number of civil society organizations like the Hillmen's Association, Kalimpong Samiti, Gorkha Janapustakālaya (Library), Nepali Sāhitya Sammelan, Gorkha Dukha Niwārak Sammelan, Sri Hitkari Sammelan, Himalayan Kala Mandir, and others emerged. Gradually a host of periodicals emerged from the region such as *Nebulā*, *darsha*, *Aba*, *Khoji*, *Nepālī Sāhitya Sammelan Patrikā* which was later renamed *Diyālo*. During the post-independence era, when political borders became more defined and rigid, the Nepali community grappled with larger issues of identity and belonging. This period witnessed the emergence of diverse periodicals such as *Bhārati*, *Gorkha*, *Janadut*, *Gunāso*, *Hāmro Bhāsā*, *Himādri*, *Gāu Sudhār Patrikā*, *Mālingo*, *Pukār*, *Janadut* and others.

Language of Print

If language plays a pivotal role in the integration of heterogeneous groups into what Anderson calls an 'imagined community', the need of an instrument that could tie people together in different ways than earlier modes of kinship, caste, clan, or religion was essential. According to Anderson, 'print-capitalism' was that instrument that made it possible to link 'fraternity, power, and time meaningfully together'. 'National print language' was the ideological and political tool that laid the basis for national consciousness.⁴ He further highlights the instrumental role that the 'growth in literacy, commerce, industry, communication, and state machinery' played in the unification of vernacular languages within

each dynastic realm. Language was therefore the key foundation on which the Nepali nation could be formed and though Nepali was not endorsed by the state, its rise to prominence in the Darjeeling region was a complex phenomenon. Kumar Pradhan observes that, had the pre-literate, multi-lingual populace sharing a common space, not mobilized their private concern for a common language to conduct interactions in an intelligible way, the question of Nepali nation in Darjeeling would have hardly emerged.⁵ However, the colonial rule too played a crucial role in the creation of symbols and forms to institutionalize Nepali language at the cost of delegitimizing the several other creoles, pidgins, and 'non-standard' dialects.⁶ Colonial policies concerning language tried to apply rational, European standards and categories: 'first of all, in advocating the use of the vernacular as the language of education and administration, and then in trying to define the best or 'true' script and style and encouraging their use'.⁷ In case of the diverse communities living in Darjeeling and in all the confusion of tongues, many individuals of different tribes could communicate with one another, but not one could understand or speak a word of English, which undoubtedly made administration difficult for the British in the Darjeeling region.⁸ Hence, learning the language of the natives was a primary requisite in establishing colonial rule and the British evidently attempted to find a common language spoken by majority of the community in the region, which was the *Parbatiya* or Nepali dialect. Nepali found a colonial standardized version to be used by the British officials.⁹ With the advent of Nepali print capitalism in Benaras, the use of Nepali as the print language greatly increased the formal use of the language. Later, eminent literary figures like Parasmani Pradhan, Dharanidhar Sharma Koirala, and Surya Bikram Gewali (collectively known as Su-Dha-Pa) championed for the advancement of Nepali, which took the shape of linguistic nationalism that would further bind the heterogeneous masses of the hills into a unified *jāti*. In this way, traditional dialects lost prominence and their scripts gradually disappeared in the region while Nepali took centre-stage, to an extent that today, the people who belong to these ethnic groups hardly find their dialects intelligible. Therefore, this process of institutionalization further bolstered by print made Nepali a 'language of power'.

Forging a Readership: Cultivating a Literary Community

The creation of an imagined community involves the formation of a sense of belonging amongst individuals who may never meet but feel connected through a common thread of language, culture, and nationality by creating narratives, symbols and experiences that people can relate to and identify with. The newspapers and periodicals served as effective mediums for rapid dissemination of such discourses. Hence, while the early twentieth century saw an emergence of several Nepali periodicals in Darjeeling, one of the foundational steps involved the establishment of a readership base. In an article in *Chandrikā* titled 'The Necessity of Reading Newspapers', Indra Mân Baidya states: 'But sadly, this practice is not prevalent among our Gorkhalis. It is disappointing that the periodicals and newspapers published in our own language have received no support by even the educated Gorkhas. I sincerely hope that the educated Gorkhas will provide the desired remedy to improve the health of the periodicals and newspapers printed in our language.'¹⁰

The above statement paints a poignant picture of newspaper consumption within the Nepali community. The literature of the time provides a broader insight into the challenging circumstances faced by the Nepali periodicals. A sense of despair is palpable in works like A.K. Sambhu's 'Alas! Gorkhali', and Vasundhari Devi's 'Prayer', in *Chandrikā*, that highlights the alarming shortage of readers. Since a question posed by Sardar Bahadur Dewan, in the inaugural issue received no response, Devi's 'Prayer' decries the Gorkha community's apparent indifference to its own affairs and implores them to 'Speak up!' and not squander precious time.¹¹ Lekhnāth Poudyāl's essay 'Necessity' also sheds light on the dismal state of Nepali language periodicals, portraying their pathetic fate and death. He states how the *Gorkha Patra* in Nepal struggles with a limited readership while the weekly, *Gorkhali*, from Banaras is described as ailing and in need of proper care and nourishment. *Chandrikā* itself is ascribed the metaphor of a 'young girl' in need of support and nourishment¹², appealing for the support from virtuous individuals dedicated to the development of the language. Parasmani too likens the periodical to a toddler attempting amateur expressions.¹³ Such personifications not only humanize the publication but imply that, like an infant, it is in its early stages of development and may lack the sophistication of refined communication. This underscores the need to nurture, to help the periodical mature and deliver more cultivated content. The overall narrative underscores the urgent need of collective action and support to revive and sustain Nepali periodicals during this challenging period. Images such as the 'Bharat Mata' or in this case *Chandrikā*, as a young girl, serve to evoke nationalist feelings by tapping into emotional connections and invoking a sense of duty and belonging towards one's nation.¹⁴

With the establishment of the All India Gorkha League (AIGL) in 1943, the first political body of the Nepalis in India, *Gorkha* emerged in 1945 as its mouthpiece. Dambar Singh Gurung, the president of the AIGL, in his essay, 'The Birth of Gorkha'¹⁵ notes that periodicals of that era may have struggled due to lack of engaging content and a reluctance to delve into political matters. Hence, *Gorkha* was founded with a political ideology, with emphasis on the importance of political discourse to disrupt monotony. Gurung further highlights the need to break free from a state of ignorance and actively engage with these periodicals. Expressions of support and enthusiasm from readers were evident in gratitude notes published in these periodicals. For instance, the editor of *Gorkha*, Randhir Subba, extends thanks to a subscriber who generously contributed ten rupees instead of the required four rupees for a one-year subscription.¹⁶ The anticipation that *Gorkha*, as a political periodical, would thrive, proved true. This is evident in its successful first year. In the concluding issue of the inaugural year, Hemanta Pradhān, the Director of *Gorkha*, expresses gratitude and remarks, 'everyday we've received letters expressing their eagerness to become *Gorkha* subscribers.'¹⁷ Yet *Gorkha* encountered challenges, particularly in its sixth year, where the financial report presented to the Gorkha League's Central Committee reflects that subscribers and agents had not remitted a sum exceeding ten thousand rupees. *Bhāraṭī* faced even greater setbacks and financial losses. In the periodical's editorial, titled 'Our Taste' Parasmani recounts an interaction where an agent suggested him to incorporate love stories or even erotic content in *Bhāraṭī* to boost sales: 'Write love stories in *Bhāraṭī*, Guruji! I will

sell one thousand copies in one breath”, said a book seller to me the other day. He even smiled mischievously and said-‘write erotic stories, I will take the burden of selling three thousand copies. After all, I need to make a modest income. Relying solely on literary writings is not sufficient for selling.’¹⁸

Parasmani acknowledges the financial constraints of selling literary periodicals in a market where hundred copies of Hindi’s *Manohar Kahaniya* (Sensational Stories) sold hundred copies while it was a Herculean task to sell even ten copies of *Bhāratī*. However, Parasmani makes it clear that the initiative of starting the periodical was not motivated by the pursuit of profit and that *Bhāratī*’s standards could not be compromised by cheap publicity stunts. This reflects that literary content in the contemporary society faced challenges in capturing a larger audience compared to sensational or popular genres and highlights that periodicals of the time, such as *Bhāratī*, failed to cater to a variety of reader interests.

Sadly, many other periodicals of the period were short lived and met an untimely death due to crisis of readership. However, despite the challenges faced by periodicals like *Bhāratī* and *Diyālo* in gaining traction within the society, the periodical stewards were driven by a genuine passion for language and societal development and persevered in their dedication to serving society. In *Bhāratī*’s concluding issue, Parasmani asserts that, despite numerous obstacles and financial difficulties, the primary goal of producing the auspicious 108 issues was successfully achieved.

Also, it is important to note that these educated elites demonstrated a broad vision by extending the reach of their periodicals beyond geographical boundaries. These periodicals often featured contributions from writers based in Nepal and beyond. In fact, an announcement in *Chandrikā*, addressing readers in Nepal state that, they could now conveniently purchase the journal from Malick Gorkha Agency Nepal.¹⁹ In the first issue of *Bhāratī*’s third year, Mahendra Beer Bikram Shah, the then King of Nepal, expresses satisfaction with the periodical’s efforts to enhance Nepali literature, and even agrees to be its prime-patron. Therefore, while these periodicals primarily concentrate on the experiences of Nepalis in India, the ‘imagined community’ they create extends well beyond the borders of India indicative of a shared cultural space that transcends national borders.

Being Nepali: The creation of the ‘imagined’ ‘jāti’

The idea of ‘Nepalipani’ and the feeling of ‘we’ (*hāmi*) dates as far back as the reign of King Prithivi Narayan Shah, his unification of Nepal and the consolidation of the Nepali identity. The homogenization of the ethnic groups as ‘we Nepalis’ was further propagated by King Gyanendra, who called upon every Nepali to rise above ‘I’ and begin to think as a collective ‘we’ instead.²⁰ Within the Indian borders, the situation of the nationality question of the Nepalis as a ‘sub-nation’, and the urge to belong and shed their ‘sub-ness’, is evident in the quest for Indian Nepali nation in Darjeeling. Hence, the shaping of a homogenous Nepali identity, which no doubt involved organic changes and developments²¹, was still motivated by the need to carve out a distinctive nation of their own in India, whose members are not confined to the political boundary of a country called Nepal.

The problem with the idea of the 'imagined community' is the predicament of having to 'other' in order to assert itself for there can be no 'we' without 'them'. This fashioning of the 'we' in the case of the Nepalis has been historical in shaping the modern Nepali identity. The articulation of a collective 'we' among Nepalis, has involved a feeling of unity shaped by common historical experiences and collective narratives, and at times, emphasizing differences with neighboring communities, contributing to a nuanced understanding of their own identity. From a class perspective Kumar Pradhan argued, 'the national consciousness of the Indian Nepalis emerged on the pretext of a subjective feeling of commonality in the life experiences of the exploited and subjugated classes,' which laid the groundwork for the 'us' versus 'them' divide between Nepalis and plainsmen, despite neither owning the means of production.²² For Pradhan, class analysis became a tool to grasp the experience of being a hill person, or more specifically, a Nepali in Darjeeling's history. As a result, the modern Nepali identity emerges as a product of historical negotiations, contestations, and accommodations, reflecting the intricate process of self-definition in relation to the 'other'.

With the construction and solidification of the Nepali identity, marked by the dialectics of inclusion and exclusion, yet another pertinent question that arises is, if an entirely authentic Nepali identity truly exists? Though ethnographic studies have attempted to record the 'authentic' cultures and communities of Nepal, one of the defining features of Nepal is its ethnic diversity which is a testament of its people's resilience and adaptability. In the Darjeeling region, the assimilation, and a degree of acculturation, has led to the emergence of a more consolidated Nepali identity based on their shared history, common cultural roots and collective memory. Still the larger questions surrounding the authenticity of 'Nepaliness' in the Indian context, looms. It can however be argued, that the construction of a wide, shared sense of belonging within the Nepali community in India, could have hardly been achieved without adulteration.

Therefore, the Nepali identity is characterized by its hybrid nature, but it is additionally the confusion between Nepalese and Indian Nepali identities that adds to this complexity for Nepal's historical and geographical proximity to border regions in India blurs lines and fosters a sense of shared heritage. This hybridity in identity, shaped by both internal diversity and external influences, highlights the nuanced nature of being Nepali. In a compelling letter to the editor, of the *Gorkha*, a writer named Parmananda Giri raises thought-provoking questions, challenging the notion that migration of Gorkhalis severs their ties to Nepal.²³ Giri questions whether citizenship alone defines identity, emphasizing the potential exclusionary concept that only residents of Nepal can be considered Nepali while those living outside Nepal are 'A Nepali' (not quite Nepali).²⁴ This raises the notion that Nepalis outside Nepal may be perceived as less authentic, prompting a deeper exploration of how migration and citizenship intersect with notions of belonging and national affiliation. This fear of (in)authenticity on one hand and questions of belonging on the other, is further accentuated by the periodical *Bhāratī*'s motto: "We are Nepali Bhāratī (Indians), let us follow Bhāratī. Let us revere Bhāratī and die as devoted followers of Bhāratī'. These narratives encapsulate the complex interplay between Nepali and Indian identities that characterized the Nepali community's quest for self-definition

in India. It serves as a poignant reflection of the nuanced struggle for identity experienced by Nepalis in India, thus highlighting the tension between their Nepali heritage and their lived reality as Indian citizens, for though the Nepalis in India trace their roots to Nepal, they do not tie their imagined connection with Nepal as their homeland. Since ‘the desire to come back home’, which is the essential marker of a diasporic community does not hold true in the case of the Indian Nepalis, the Indian Nepali nation cannot be considered a diasporic nation.²⁵

Another noteworthy issue pertaining to the challenges inherent in nation-building and nationalism in the Indian Nepali context is the conflict between the adoption of the terms ‘Nepali’ and ‘Gorkhali’, to collectively represent the various ethnic groups within the Nepali community. In the agitation for separate statehood in 1980, Subash Ghising, the leader of Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) coined the term ‘Gorkhaland’ for this proposed new state. Later in 1988, when an autonomous hill council was set up, Ghising insisted on retaining the term ‘Gorkha’ and agreed to the council’s name as being Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council instead of Darjeeling Hill Council.²⁶ To comprehend this, it is imperative to revisit the earlier discussions and debates that laid the foundation for it. Though a cursory understanding would suggest that these terms are somewhat like two sides of the same coin, a thorough study reveals that the words Indian Nepalis or Gorkhas are particularly used to denote Nepali citizens of India, for though the small kingdom of Gorkha did much in the unification of Nepal, ‘Gorkhali’ was not a term widely used to represent the people of Nepal.²⁷ This underscores an effort to establish a clear distinction, separating them from their brethrens in Nepal, for ‘an inescapable part of being Nepali in the world beyond Nepal’s borders is that Nepalis must struggle for the right to belong’.²⁸

Some of the essays published during these formative years record the many debates that ensued regarding the socio-cultural and political implications of the terms ‘Nepali’ and ‘Gokhali’, if they could be used interchangeably, or if only one of these terms should be formally accepted. Prior to the establishment of the AIGL, the members of the committee underwent numerous deliberations regarding its naming. A speech given by Dambar Singh Gurung, to address the gathering in Darjeeling on 14th May 1943, published in Bulletin no.5 of the AIGL, states;

Now do listen as to why between the terms ‘Gorkha’ and ‘Nepali’, we preferred ‘Gorkha’. We had many discussions regarding this and many still say that the name Nepali League would have been better than the Gorkha League. We had no objection to this but one has to consider a lot of things before giving anything a name- which name will fulfill our goals better, which name is popular worldwide, by which name do the other communities know us?

Hence, to the founding fathers of the AIGL, ‘Gorkha’ was an umbrella term, inclusive of all the ethnic races that inhabited modern-day India, but trace their origins to Nepal, and a sense of we(ness) could be only be fostered by addressing them as ‘Gorkhali’. Also, the use of the word reflects the AIGL’s broader inclination to align with the popular perception of the Gorkhas as a formidable martial race.²⁹ However, the debates surrounding the name ensued and remained unresolved. Ramakrishna Sharma, a foremost Nepali critic’s essay in *Bhāratī* titled ‘Gorkhali’ highlights AIGL’s opting for

‘Gorkhali’ over ‘Nepali’ and its implications on the issue of identity. He writes;

The primary motive behind this is to honor our soldiers whose valor has positioned our *jāti*'s ancestral land and motherland in the global political map. Another reason being, the Bhutias and Lepchās who consider themselves as separate communities do not feel like they have betrayed their conscience when enlisted in the army under the Gorkha regiment. Therefore, with the hope that the above mentioned communities could potentially be connected through a common thread, the term ‘Gorkhali’ was employed instead of ‘Nepali’.³⁰

However, since certain factions disapproved of the term ‘Gorkhali’ as being exclusionary and hence, unfit to represent all the ethnic groups who were considered ‘Nepali’, Sharma’s essay is an attempt at flouting this misunderstanding. Sharma presents a detailed account of how, despite the etymology of the word ‘Gorkhali’ tracing back to the Gorkha district in Nepal, inhabited by Bāhun, Chettri, and few other groups, ethnicities like Kirāt, Tāmang, Tharu, Sherpā, and others, became the residents of Gorkha under the rule of King Prithivi Narayan Shah. He further rejects the notion that the word ‘Gorkha’ originated from *gaurakshā* (protector of cows). For if that was the case, the Bahuns, Chettris, Shahis should have been called Gorkhali prior to King Prithivi Narayan’s ascension of Gorkha. For Sharma, as opposed to those who daubed the usage of ‘Gorkhali’ as communal, ‘Gorkha’ was not a sectarian term since it was accepted as a synonym of ‘Nepali’ by renowned figures: eg, Motiram Bhatta’s naming of the first Nepali periodical as *Gorkhā Bhārat Jīwan*. In response to Sharma’s article, Shri Ganeshlal Subba’s ‘Nepali or Gorkhali?’³¹, in the same periodical, analyzes Sharma’s use of the title ‘Gorkhali’ and Surya Bikram Gewali’s use of ‘Nepali’³² for their respective essays. He states, ‘...the seed of *jāti* planted by Prithivi Narayan Shah has not germinated yet. But it will grow, and bear flowers and fruits for the formation of a modern Nepali *jāti* is inevitable. But, if this is the situation in Nepal, then what is the situation of those who have settled within the Indian borders? Have the various ethnic groups that have settled in India assimilated into a unified *jāti*? Since the Nepalis (or Gorkhalis?) in Darjeeling district and Sikkim are living as a community and because these areas were once a part of the Nepal kingdom, the progression towards a modern Nepali identity is only possible here.’ He further mentions that one only needs to carefully observe the Nepali populace of Darjeeling and Sikkim to understand that the various ethnic groups are gradually coming together as a unified community and at present they exist somewhere between a collective entity and a modern *jāti*. Subba finally asks a pertinent question which leads us back to the issue of naming: ‘what shall we name this modern *jāti*? ‘Gorkhali’ or ‘Nepali’? Do we want to become a modern *jāti* or do we want to remain divided in groups?’ He concludes, that to embody a modern identity, one that has transitioned from varied *janajātis* to a unified *jāti*, the Nepalis in India must opt for the name ‘Nepali’ and solely that.³³

The issue surrounding the nomenclature, therefore, reflects the dynamic and fluid nature of the Nepali identity in India. Parasmani himself used the term ‘Gorkhali’ in his ‘Gazal’ published in *Gorkhay Khabar Kāgat*, stating ‘Oh! Gorkhali, you are asleep’³⁴, and this label was used by prominent publications, alongside the use of ‘Nepali’. One can find an equal usage of ‘Gorkhali’ and ‘Nepali’ in *Chandrikā*, while *Bhāraṇī* and other periodicals like *Nebulā* and *darsha* consistently employed the

term ‘Nepali’, while *Gorkha*, persisted in the use of the term ‘Gorkha’. Parasmani in the eighth year of *Bhārati* emphasizes the importance of using a singular term, ‘Nepali’, arguing that the use of various terms creates confusion for non-Nepalis, which further complicates the already precarious status of Nepali identity.

Visions of Progress

Simultaneous to the efforts at building a vibrant readership and forging a unified Indian Nepali identity, was the need to use periodicals as effective mediums for engaging with progressively modern concepts and drive social, economic and cultural advancement. Discourses within these periodicals often delved into the examination of the existing social realities, highlighting areas of backwardness and proposing ways to initiate development. The word *unnati* resurfaces across various periodicals of the era and *unnati* could be attained by *ekta* (unity), pursuit of *vidyā* (knowledge), and *bhāsonati* (progress of the mother tongue). Numerous essays and poems underscore the lack of ‘*ektā*’ and, consequently, emphasize the necessity for it, in order to foster collaboration, strength, and a shared sense of purpose. The establishment of the Hill-People’s Social Union Darjeeling in the year 1934, mirrors an attempt to bring together the Bhutia, Lepchas, and Nepalis as one. Hence, its mouthpiece, *Nebulā*³⁵ (Ne-Nepali, Bu-Bhutia, La-Lepcha) was initiated. The primary objective of the Union was ‘to foster brotherhood and to augment further the existing tie of social unity among the different Hill-people, viz. the Nepalese, the Bhutias and the Lepchas’.³⁶ The colors chosen by the brethrens for the Union were Gold, Blue and Red representing Brahma, Bishnu and Maheshwar of the Hindus, the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha of the Buddhists and the Trinity of the Christians. The three colors represented the three communities and the Union Jack, in the midst of the tri-color banner represented the membership of the Great British Empire. The sign of the Union was three fingers of the right hand held up separately to represent the three communities, and the thumb pressing over the little finger signifying ‘unity’.

The publication of *Chandrikā* in 1918, had marked a transformative shift. *Chandrikā* is a Sanskrit word meaning ‘moonlight’. It was to be published on first week of the *Shuklapaksha* (waxing phase of the moon that starts on the day of the New Moon, and continues until the Full Moon), an auspicious day when the divine rays of the Moon falls on earth. This, combined with the symbolism inherent in its name aligned perfectly with the periodical’s overarching goal; to dispel societal darkness and usher in illumination. A renowned poem by Dharnidhar Sharma Koirala, ‘Awake’ in *Chandrikā*, employs the metaphor of awakening, signifying the initiation of the process of nation-building.

Sacrifice your deep sleep, you’ve slept enough, now rise.
Friends and countrymen! Wake up and work towards progress.
Wash, wash the contamination of your hearts, dispel your fears.
Awaken, awaken now, arise and awake, work towards progress.³⁷

This metaphorical sleep portrays the community as in a state of dormancy, requiring profound awakening. Numerous writings across periodicals echo similar sentiments, often times highlighting

that lack of collective urge for progress impeded societal development, hindering the community from embracing positive changes, innovation, and adaptation to contemporary challenges. Once the community would be awakened, the next step involved collectively striving for progress. Education was regarded as the means by which the society could move out of its state of ignorance. Also, various essays on women's education, signifies its pivotal role in societal development. However, *vidyā* which translates to 'knowledge' transcends mere bookish knowledge to embrace a deeper journey towards wisdom. Writings such as 'Dharma', 'Knowledge', 'Good Character is the Basis of Progress', 'Unity', 'Love', 'Or You Shall Be Ruined!', 'The Importance of Science' etc, therefore, reflect broad visions of progress, with continued emphasis on values such as integrity, compassion, morality, which are crucial to nation-building. The launching of, *Khojī* (meaning 'to search'), the mouthpiece of the Gorkhā Dukha Niwārak Sammelan (GDNS) in 1940, encapsulates the essence of exploration and to delve into the unknown with a sense of curiosity and pursuit of progress. Also, distinct voices emerged for the articulation of alternative paths to progress; urging individuals to explore avenues such as entrepreneurship and skill development, and *darsha* (1930) was an example of that. *darsha* distinguished itself by not solely focusing on literary content but incorporating a wide spectrum of subjects, including artistry, farming, business, trade, education, and cooperative banking, for which books in Nepali were not yet available. Furthermore, the vision of *unnati* extended to *bhāsonati*, the preservation and promotion of the mother tongue, thus echoing Hariśchandra's speech 'work for the progress of your nation, in your own language'. Parasmani and other language enthusiasts like Dharnidhar Koirala, and Surya Bikram Gewali, propagated for the standardization of Nepali, in order to bring about uniformity in spelling and grammar; which was considered key for the progression of Nepali language and literature. This was a discourse that took centre stage until the last decades of the twentieth century, and continues till this date. Replete with several debates on standardization, *Bhārāti* and *Nepālī Sāhitya Sammelan Patrikā* (the mouthpiece of Nepali Sahitya Sammelan), played a crucial role in advancement of Nepali literature and language. Therefore, these ideas collectively formed a roadmap towards a more enlightened and progressive society.

While the pursuit of progress necessitated embracing modern forms of progress, the simultaneous urge and necessity to protect tradition can be found in discourses surrounding the preservation of culture, customs, traditions, attire, and civilization. Recorded in the third issue of inaugural year of *Gorkhā*, the speech given by Bal Bahadur Chettri on AIGL's foundation day, documents an embrace of progress intertwined with the preservation of tradition. This dichotomy in the 'progress of tradition' is a call to reject the overwhelming influence of Western culture, symbolizing a resistance to external influences and the preservation of indigenous culture. Hence, in the midst of embracing modern means to progress, a notable counterbalance is reflected as progress signaled a defiant departure from complete adherence to modernity. The tension between contemporary values and traditional beliefs is also reflected in discussions surrounding the role of women and women's education. As evidenced in an article titled 'The Position of Women in Society', the author R. Ghising, while advocating for women's education, also suggests that it should primarily serve to enhance their abilities in married

life, thereby reinforcing traditional gender roles and expectations. Such viewpoints underscore the tension between promoting women's education as a means of empowerment and perpetuating societal norms that confine women to domestic spheres. The perception of women as both subjects and objects reflects societal attitudes towards gender roles and empowerment.

Conclusion

Therefore, this study showcases the pivotal role printed narratives played in perpetuating the notion of being Nepali through the reinforcement of the 'imagined' *jāti*. Through the pages of these periodicals, we not only get an insight into the roles of elites in shaping attitudes and popular opinions, such as narratives of progress, but also the narratives of struggle in a society grappling with questions of identity and belonging. The challenges pertaining to creation of readership possibly exposes the community's orally tuned past rooted in diverse cultures and languages, and the problems of navigating modernity within a dominant print language. Anderson's notion of 'imagined communities' though influential, encounters limitations when directly applied to the Nepali community within this context. First, the crisis of readership that contributed to the unequal distribution of readership, causing disparities in access to information and cultural narrative can disrupt the envisioned simultaneity theorized by Anderson. Secondly, there is an issue of territoriality, wherein the notion of a unified Nepali community transcends geographical boundaries, thus challenging conventional understandings of nationhood tied to specific territories. The Himalayan region, as a contact zone, stands as a distinctive and intricate landscape marked by a myriad of complexities, where arbitrariness and ambiguities prevail. Hence, the limitations of Anderson's 'imagined communities', becomes particularly pronounced in areas like the Darjeeling region, where cultural and historical bonds with Nepal co-exist with its integration into modern India. Cross-cultural engagements further contribute to the intricate mosaic, highlighting the need for an analytical framework that goes beyond traditional conceptualizations. In navigating the complexities of the Himalayan region, and in this context, the Darjeeling region, an approach that embraces diversity, acknowledges historical entanglements, and recognizes the evolving nature of identity is imperative. The region's socio-cultural landscape is not confined to predefined categories but thrives on the richness derived from the interplay of various influences, demanding a nuanced perspective to comprehend its multifaceted realities.

Notes

- ¹ Before *Sudha Sagar*, the first issue of *Gorkha Bharat Jiwan*, edited by Motiram Bhatta was published in Benaras in 1886. This is mentioned in Grishma Bahadur Devkota's 'The Development of Newsmagazines and Press in Nepal'. This is why *Gorkha Bharat Jiwan* is considered to be the first newsmagazine to be published in Nepali. Around the same time, a local press used to publish another magazine, *Bharat Jiwan* in Hindi, which carried an advertisement of *Gorkha Bharat Jiwan*. However, apart from this one evidence, no one has laid eyes on the magazine or met anyone who has seen it. This has led to a deduction that maybe the well-meaning desire to publish

Gorkha Bharat Jiwan never materialized. Professor Balkrishna Rupawasi, a linguist expert, is said to have spent an entire week inside the office of that organization in search for evidence on the said magazine, with the hope of stretching the history of Nepali newsmagazines, but found nothing. Had he found a concrete proof, 1886 could be considered as the beginning of Nepali periodicals but since history cannot be based on myth, *Sudha Sagar* is considered to be first Nepali periodical.

- ² Nagendramani Pradhan, *Dā Pārasmaniko Jivanyātarā* (Darjeeling: Dr. Parasmani Prakashan, 1991), pp 49.
- ³ Hira Chettri, *Bhārateli Nepāli Patra-Patrikāko Satābdi 1887-1986* (Kalimpong: Charitra Prakāshan, 2011), 32-33
- ⁴ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, (Rawat Publications: Jaipur, 2015), pp 44-45.
- ⁵ Kumar Pradhan, *Dārjilingmā Nepāli Jāti ra Janajātiya Cinārikā Nayā Udānharu*, The Mahesh Chandra Regmi Lecture (Lalitpur: Social Science Baha, 2004), 12.
- ⁶ Swatahsiddha Sarkar, “Nepali Nation and Nationalism in Darjeeling,” *Studies in Nepali History and Society* 20, no. 1 (2015): 49.
- ⁷ Orsini Francesca. 2002, *The Hindi Public Sphere: 1920-1940* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002), 23.
- ⁸ Archibald Campbell, *Final Report of the Survey of Settlement of the Kalimpong Government Estate in the District of Darjeeling* (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1905), 6.
- ⁹ For more details, see Bernard Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Form of Knowledge: The British India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002), 33., and Kumar Pradhan, *History of Nepali Literature* (New Delhi: Sahitya Academy, 1984), 10.
- ¹⁰ Indra Mān Baidya, “Akhbār Patraharu Parnako washyakta,” *Chandrikā* 1, no 7 (1918): 21-22.
- ¹¹ Vasundharā Devī, “Prārthanā,” *Chandrikā* 1 no. 4 (1918): 18-19.
- ¹² Lekhnāth Poudyāl, “washyakta,” *Chandrikā* 1, no. 1 (1918): 2-4.
- ¹³ Pārasmani Pradhān, “Priya Pāthakbarga,” *Chandrikā* 1, no. 12(1918): 21.
- ¹⁴ For detailed discussion on the use of Bhārat Māta imagery in instilling nationalistic feelings, and the symbolic significance in evoking feelings of patriotism, solidarity and collective identity among Indians, transcending regional, linguistic and religious barriers, see Sugata Bose, *A Hundred Horizons: The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).
- ¹⁵ Dambar Singh Gurung, “Gorkhā ko Janma,” *Gorkhā* 1, no. 1 (1945): 5-7.
- ¹⁶ Randhir Subba, “Dhanyabaad,” *Gorkhā* 1, no. 11 (1945): 12.
- ¹⁷ Hemanta Pradhān, “Gorkhāka Priya Pāthakbarga,” *Gorkhā* 1, no. 23/24 (1945): 16.

- ¹⁸ Pārasmani Pradhān, “Our Taste,” *Bhāratī* 4, no. 1 (1952): 50.
- ¹⁹ Pārasmani Pradhān, “Nepalka Grahak Haulai Suchana,” *Chandrikā* 1, no. 3 (1918): 26.
- ²⁰ CK Lal, “We Nepālīs. How to make Nepālīpan more inclusive,” *Nepālī Times*, no. 136 (March, 2003): <https://archive.Nepalitimes.com/news.php?id=4018>. Also see, John Whelpton, “Political Identity in Nepal: State, Nation, and Community” in *Nationalism and Ethnicity in a Hindu Kingdom: The Politics of Culture in Contemporary Nepal*, eds. David Gellner, Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka and John Whelpton (Amsterdam: Harwood, 1997), 39.
- ²¹ Pradhan was the first to argue that while the nation formation in Nepal has undergone the process which may be called as *kamila prakrya* (a process in which people forage in group like the ants), the process of Nepali nation formation in Darjeeling was a result of a cultural renaissance which could be called the *mauri prakrya* (swarming of bees) For more details see, For more details see, Kumar Pradhan, *Dārjīngmā Nepālī Jātī ra Janajātīya Cīnārīkā Nāyā Udānharu*. The Mahesh Chandra Regmi Lecture (Lalitpur: Social Science Baha, 2005), 3.
- ²² Kumar Pradhān, “Agam Singh Girīko Kavītāmā Jātīya Bhāvanā,” in *Adhiti Kehi*, ed. Kumar Pradhān Siliguri: Purnima Prakashan, 2005 (1982), 109-133.
- ²³ Parmānanda Girī, “Sampādak Lāi Patra,” *Gorkhā* 4, no. 49 (1948): 751.
- ²⁴ Fisher noted that Tanka Prasād charya, a political leader opposing the Rana regime in Kathmandu ‘unlike most other Nepalese politicians, such as B.P. Koirālā...who lived much of his life, and received much of his education, in India, Tanka Prasād is an unadulterated Nepālī’. This remark underscores the complexity of the Nepālī identity. For more details, see James F. Fisher, *Living Martyrs. Individuals and Revolution in Nepal* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), 4.
- ²⁵ T.B. Subba, “Living the Nepali Diaspora in India: An Autobiographical Essay,” in *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* 133 (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 2008): 216.
- ²⁶ Hutt states that in the late 1980s, the political discourse in Darjeeling revolved around what to call the non-Nepalese Nepālī community. The term ‘pravāsī’, meaning dwelling in a foreign land, fell out of favor as the movement aimed to assert that Nepālīs in India should not be viewed as foreigners. Intellectuals in Darjeeling and Kathmandu began using ‘Bhāratīya Nepālī’ or Indian Nepālī but the leaders of the Gorkhāland movement (from whom these intellectuals began distancing themselves), were adamant that severing ties with Nepal was essential for Nepālīs India. Hence, the chosen label became Gorkhā. For more details see, Michael Hutt, “Being Nepali without Nepal: Reflections on a South Asian Diaspora” in *Nationalism and Ethnicity in a Hindu Kingdom: The Politics of Culture in Contemporary Nepal*, eds. David Gellner, Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka and John Whelpton (Amsterdam: Harwood, 1997), 39.
- ²⁷ Kumar Pradhān states that the term ‘Gorkhā’ finds its historical roots in the nomenclature adopted by the British Gorkhā Officers. This term, with its martial undertones, gained prominence and was subsequently utilized by Colonel W. Brook Northey in his book ‘The Gurkhas’, contributing to its recognition in the context of the Gorkhā regiments and their military history. On the contrary,

- the language known by various names like Khas-Kurā, Parbatīya and Gorkhālī assumed the name 'Nepālī' only after the establishment of the present kingdom of Nepal. Interestingly, the locals did not use this name initially. J.A.Ayton, in 1820, is believed to be one of the first to use the term in his grammar of the Nepālī language. During their residence in Nepal from 1829 to 1842, Hamilton and B.H. Hodgeson referred to the language as Khasa and Parbatīya. In Nepal, poets and writers commonly referred to it as 'bhasha', Khas-kura, or Parbatīya, even though it was officially Gorkhālī. The term 'Nepālī' gained popularity outside Nepal, and the country's rulers officially recognized it in the 1930s, facilitated by the unification of Nepal. For details, see Kumar Pradhan, *The Gorkha Conquests: The process and consequences of the unification of Nepal, with particular reference to Eastern Nepal* (Kathmandu: Social Science Baha, 2009), 224
- ²⁸ Michael Hutt, "Where is Home for an Indian Nepālī Writer?," in *Indian Nepālīs: Issues and Perspectives*, eds. T. B Subba, A.C.Sinha, G.S Nepal and D.R. Nepal (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company: 2009), 47
- ²⁹ See AIGL's Bulletin no. 5.
- ³⁰ Ramakrishna Sharmā, 'Gorkhālī,' *Bhāratī* 3, no. 9 (1952): 413-419.
- ³¹ Shri Ganeshlāl Subbā was at that point the Secretary of the Darjeeling Committee of the Communist Party of India.
- ³² Surya Bikram Gewāli, "Nepālī," *Bhāratī* 2, no. 11 (1951): 560-561.
- ³³ Shri Ganeshlāl Subba, "Nepālī ki Gorkhālī?," *Bhāratī* 3, no. 12 (1952): 553-562.
- ³⁴ Chettri states that the 'Gazal' was published in *Gorkhāy Khabar Kāgat* on 1st October 1916. However, Chettri has resorted to using a lot of secondary sources. Regrettably, *Gorkhāy Khabar Kāgat* appears to be inaccessible or missing. For more details see, Hira Chettri, *Bhārateli Nepālī Patra-Patrikāko Satābdi 1887-1986* (Kalimpong: Charitra Prakāshan, 2011), 32.
- ³⁵ *Nebulā* was later changed to *Parivartan*, since the three communities were no longer members.
- ³⁶ This speech was published both in English and Nepālī in *Nebulā*. The usage of 'Nepalese' instead of 'Nepālīs' in this context could be indicative of either an oversight or a lack of awareness regarding the evolving political and social landscape. It is possible that at the time, the individuals or entities responsible for language choice were not fully conscious of the nuances or implications surrounding the terminology. Additionally, it could reflect a broader trend of using more general terms without much consideration of its implications.
- ³⁷ Dharnidhar Sharmā Koirālā, "Udbodhan," *Chandrikā* 1, no. 10 (1918): 22-23.

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Nepali Periodicals

darsha, monthly (January – August 1930) Kalimpong

Editor and publisher: Ses Mani Pradhan

Bhārati, monthly (1949-1958), Darjeeling

Editor and publisher: The Chief Editor was Rup Narayan Sinha till Year 6 no 6, Editor was Paramani Pradhan, and Parasmani Pradhan was chief editor and editor following Rup Narayan Sinha's demise.

Chandrikā, monthly (January 1918- September 1919), Kurseong

Editor and publisher: Parasmani Pradhan, succeeded for final two issues by Rasmi Prasad Ale

Gorkhā, weekly (1945- 1980s), Kalimpong, then published from Darjeeling after the shifting of AIGL head office to Darjeeling.

Editors: Randhir Subba, Shiv Kumar Rai, Tikaram Sharma, Laxmiprasad Kshatriya, Ramakrishna Sharma, Purna Prasad Sharma, Narjit Sinha Chettri, Narbahadur dahal, Devprakash Rai, Jagat Chettri, Rupram Dewan

Khoji, monthly (1940-1941), Darjeeling

Editor- Rup Narayan Sinha, published by Gorkhā Dukha Niwārak Sammelan

Nepālī Sāhitya Sammelan Patrikā, later known as *Diyālo* annual (1931-1936), Darjeeling

Editor and publisher: Padmaprasad Pradhan, published by Nepali Sahitya Sammelan

Nebulā, monthly (February 1935-January 1936), Kalimpong

Editor and publisher: K.D. Pradhan, published by the Hill-Peoples' Social Union

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