

The Emergence of an Ethnic Identity: The Case Study of the "Gorkhali" of Garhwal, Uttar Pradesh

Subhadra Mitra Channa

The word ethnic group has come up in anthropological literature in response to the post World War II social realities, specifically in the context of the formation of the democratic Nation states and the phenomenon of Globalization. The non-violent as well as frequently violent exertion of identity by certain groups within a nation state either for secessionist purposes or for greater economic and political mileage has increasingly concentrated the attention of social scientists towards this phenomenon. A plethora of definitions and theoretical concepts to explain and define ethnic or ethnicity exists. The most common thread which runs through all these definitions is that the ethnic assertions are directly linked to the attempts by nation states to unify diverse social political entities under one label and also that it is an *etic* and not an *emic* concept. The self perception of a group has to be complemented by its perception by others and the actions of the ethnic group in exerting its identity is always outwardly directed. As Barth (1969) has pointed out in his seminal essay, an ethnic group has more to do with boundaries than with inner structures; it is more of an idea than concretized reality.

Yinger (1997: 4) suggests that an ethnic group "has three ingredients (1) The group is perceived by others in the society to be different in some combination of the following traits; language, religion, race, and ancestral homeland with its related culture (2) the members also perceive themselves as different, and (3) they participate in shared activities built around their (real or mythical) common origin or culture". Sometimes however the characteristics as presented above may be assumed rather than actual and may be freshly constituted in response to present day conditions and then projected into the past to create an aura of authenticity. At times, as in the present case, an imagined identity is converted into a real one and then exerted for the self perceived

advantage of those who align themselves under the umbrella of this identity.

When I use the word 'imagined', it is borrowed from Caplan (1995) who has used it in this very context. This 'imagined' identity has the character that is imposed on this group by others and that it has no history in the past or in the indigenous cultural system of the people under consideration. The referent 'Gorkhali' is an imagined identity, created and used by the British officers for the Nepali soldiers in their army. Although it does not derive from Nepali indigenous categories of thought, it has been used by a group of Nepali settlers in the Garhwal region of the Uttar Pradesh (U.P.) hills to create an emergent ethnic identity. The group under consideration 'decontextualizes' the term 'Gorkhali' from its earlier system of meanings, transposing it and aligning it with another set of ideas and a set of activities patterned to achieve freshly constructed goals.

I draw upon the excellent work done by Lionel Caplan (1995) on the construction of the 'Gorkha' or "Gorkhali" identity by the British and on my own fieldwork in the areas around Dehradun, where a sizeable population of the Nepali or Gorkhali resides. I was able to reconstruct an emergent identity with ethnic connotations which involves a reinterpretation and consequent strategic use of the term 'Gorkhali'.

THE SETTING

The major part of the fieldwork was done in the village Jaintanwala, which is a few kilometers from the town of Dehradun in U.P. and is at the foot of Mussourie. It is a picturesque spot set in a valley with a small river flowing alongside. The river is called Noon river or salty river because of its so called salty water. The village has about a hundred households, divided into two settlements, called the

old settlement (*Purana Basti*) and the new settlement (*Naya Basti*). The village contains a large number of 'pucca' houses, made of urban design although houses of the old type of construction with mud walls and tiled roofs are also present. As is obvious, most of the old houses are in the *Purana Basti*. The agricultural fields lie alongside the river and cover the area between the river and the settlements of houses and some are interspersed between the houses also. The village is not primarily dependent on agriculture, which remains a supplementary activity largely as a domestic subsistence. Most of the villagers derive their sustenance from other activities like jobs in the army and in other white collared or blue collared occupations. The main road running on the outside of the village is dotted with shops selling provisions and consumer goods meant for the tourists as also a small restaurant. This road goes on to other villages further on and finally to the shrine of Santala Mata, a popular folk deity. The village is located near the Army cantonment and is a ten minute bus ride from the market town of Garhi, which is not exactly an urban center but forms a continuity with the nearest really urban center of Dehradun, at a distance of a thirty minute bus ride.

The villagers at Jaintanwala have frequent interaction with Garhi and also Dehradun. If one gets into a bus then Jaintanwala is the last stop. Villages ahead of it which are on the steeper hill side are not connected by bus.

The population of the village is divided into three communities, the Garwalis, the Gorkhalis and the lower castes. The largest population is of the Gorkhalis and they are the primary occupants of the *Naya Basti*. Nearly sixty per cent of the population of the village is of the Gorkhalis. The Garwalis of this village are mostly settled in the *Purana Basti*, but as we go up the hills the smaller villages are of the Garwalis only. As we move towards the town of Garhi, the proportion of the Gorkhalis increases. Most of the Gorkhalis being army pensioners are more close to the urban way of life and hence settled near the towns. The Garwalis are the local rural population. The lower castes are settled on the outside of

the village as is to be expected. These were the traditional basket makers but most of them are now working as professional tailors. The Garwalis are locally known as 'Desi' meaning literally to be belonging to the soil. This is an ethnocentric view from the perspective of the Gorkhalis who are from Nepal.

WHO ARE THESE GORKHALIS?

They are the Nepali population who came to India with the Gorkha regiment in the Indo-British army and then joined the Indian army after 1947. As one informant put it, "when a Nepali sits under the Indian flag he is a Gorkhali, when he sits under the Nepali flag he is a Nepali." All agree that in Nepal there are no Gorkha or Gorkhali only Nepali. Many of the Gorkhali living in this region are third generation Indian citizens. Most of them have retired from the army, many young boys are still serving the army and many have come into this area from Nepal, either through marriage or through kinship networks.

The Gorkhali, as they are known here and as they refer to their own selves also, are well aware of the fact that this identity separates them as a group distinct from the parent Nepali stock. They are keen to play up this identity and exercise their Indian citizenship rights for furthering political and social ends. When asked about the origin of the name 'Gorkhali', many of them referred to the Gorkha regiment from which they came, but a few politically aspiring persons translated it as from "*Go-Rakshak*" (the defender of the cow). In other words they are also projecting a Hindu identity to which they have doubtful claim. Hindu rituals like '*Sat Narain Katha*' are becoming very popular. In the older generations the Nepali names with the prefix 'Bahadur' for men were common, example, Jung Bahadur, Khem Bahadur, etc. But the new generation prefer names like Ashok, Dilip, Dimple, Krishna etc. The Nepali stereotyped names have been given up. Names are often borrowed from popular T.V. serials or Hindi movies. In developing this local identity, the Gorkhalis here prefer to sever their relationship to the Gorkhas of Darjeeling who have

retained more of their Tibeto-Burman cultural characteristics including language. When asked about their links with the Gorkhas of West Bengal, the local Gorkhalis say, "they are not like us. They are different."

The Gorkhalis who formed part of the Gorkha regiment of the British/Indian army, come from predominantly three or four indigenous groups of Nepal, namely the Gurungs, Rai, Limbu and Magar. These are the Tibeto-Burman ethnic stocks which inhabited Nepal before the high caste Hindus from India migrated to Nepal and later formed the elite ruling classes there. These indigenous groups were those from which the British enrolled their soldiers, referring to them as the martial races, distinguishing them from the 'soft' high castes, the elite. However the Gorkhali in Garhwal are keen to divest themselves of this 'tribal' identity, preferring to project a Hindu image. The women wear *sarees* and put '*sindoor*' in the parting of their hair. Even the language that they speak is akin to that spoken by the high caste Hindus in Nepal, and not their own original, Tibeto-Burman dialect. We have already mentioned the changes in proper names, these are complimented by the change in attire. The adoption of Hindu rituals and the services of the Brahmin and the cremation of the dead, complete the transformation. Many of them admitted that in Nepal they would bury the dead, but have now taken to cremation, following the Hindu customs.

We can appreciate the transformation and the reasons for it if we probe into the origin of the 'Gurkha' name and the background of the people from whom the 'Gurkha' have emerged. Lionel Caplan (1995) has specifically referred to the Gurkha identity as a myth created by the British officers who recruited a large number of Nepalis belonging to the Tibeto-Burman tribes of middle Nepal or 'Pahar' as it is called in Nepal. The British called these people 'Gurkha', taking them as residents of the Kingdom of the Gurkha because the ruling dynasty of Nepal was founded by the house of Gurkhas who came from the valley of Kathmandu around 1768. The Rai, Limbu, Gurungs and Magars were the first wave

of people who populated the middle hilly regions of Nepal coming in from China, Tibet and Burma. These are the Tibeto-Burman tribal populations of Nepal.

In the 12th and 13th century there was a wave of migration of high caste Hindus from India because of Muslim persecution. Initially the high caste Hindus were dependent on the Tibeto-Burman populations who allowed them to settle on their land as they had plenty of land as well as a democratic attitude. These indigenous populations had cleared forests and created their own villages and had no concept of private ownership of land. However after about three centuries from the entry of the Hindu populations, the House of the Gorkhas, with its affiliation to the Hindus of Northern India, led to the establishment of a Hindu kingdom, in which the tribal identities of the original settlers were lost. A hierarchical society based on caste was superimposed on the egalitarian tribal base.

The imposition of a caste system led to the crystallization of two layers of the Nepali society. The indigenous people were relegated to the lower levels as '*matwali jat*' or 'drinking castes' because of their non-sanskritized ways of life. The twice born Brahmins, Thakuris, and Chetris became the '*tagadhari*' castes or the sacred thread bearers and these were also the ruling, elite gentry. They established their political, ritual, and economic superiority over the earlier tribal groups. Increased demographic pressures on land resources by the end of the nineteenth century squeezed out these exploited groups from the lands to which they had traditional claim. Large scale migrations took place towards India and Sikkim. The census of India, 1901, recorded nearly 25,000 persons of Nepali origin and by 1891 half of Darjeeling consisted of Nepalis.

The traditional occupation of these people was agriculture (both settled and shifting), long distance trade, soldiering and pastoralism. Under the dominance of high caste Hindus they were left with few options. As Caplan (1995: 38) describes, "It is against such a background of increasing impoverishment,

land shortages, political marginalization and official harassment that we can better understand the attraction of enlistment in the British(India) army——". The Magars and Gurungs had a long history of serving in neighbouring armies including that to Raja Ranjit Singh of the Punjab. In Nepal, soldiers serving outside armies were referred to not as Gorkhas but as Lahorees from Lahore, where they had first gone to enlist in a foreign army.

The initial attraction of the British towards the so called martial races of Nepal, was after the British war with Nepal in 1814-16. The Gorkhali (or the Nepali under the royal House of Gorkhas) had occupied Kumaon in 1793 and extended their occupations to parts of Garhwal in 1803 and between 1787 and 1812 to more than two hundred villages in the Terai. The British intolerance of such expansionist tendencies led to a military solution but interestingly enough, even before the war had ended, they had several battalions of Nepali soldiers in their army. This was the beginning of the Gurkha identity because the British referred to these battalions and to the soldiers as Gorkha battalions and the Gorkha soldiers.

Since it was a created and not a substantive identity, its use and interpretation varied as being applicable to (1) the land and people of Nepal (2) to the Tibeto-Burman Mongoloid people of Nepal or more specifically (3) to those who had served or were serving in the British army.

These identities were all recognized and mentioned by those scholars who were working in Nepal and by the British officers writing about the Gorkha forces.

THE GORKHALI IN GARHWAL

In Garhwal, in India, working in the year 1996-1997, I discovered a very different slant to this name and identity. The origin of the name was very much rooted in its application to the Nepali soldiers who were serving or had served in the British/Indian armies. The villages near Dehradun in U.P. were mostly settlements of army personnel who had come to this area with the three army cantonments of

the British. Since Independence of India from British colonization, two have been shifted but one still remains at Birpur. Another reason for the concentration of Nepali populations in this area was the historical occupation of these territories by Nepal in the early Nineteenth century. Even after the British pushed back the Nepali occupation, many Tibeto-Burman Nepalis, joined the Indian army and preferred to stay back in India. It is easy to understand the fluid loyalty of these people given the background of their marginalisation and oppression in their native land. In India, they had the advantage of greater access to resources both of land and money and in the democratic setup of the Indian state, a greater chance of establishment of a political identity.

The Gorkhalis have achieved here what they could never do in Nepal, create a dominating position for themselves in relation to the local population of the Garhwalis. Towards this end, they are actually striving for an identity which will take them away from Nepal. Significant in this respect is the reinterpretation of their name as *Go-Rakshak*. It is of academic interest to note that this concept of ethnicity is opposed to that which connects it to a 'past' or 'origin'. None of the people who are now settled in India, are enamoured of Nepal. Most admitted to life being harsh and also to poverty of land and resources. Many have encouraged relatives to come and settle with them in India, also few would like to maintain ties with those who are left behind.

A new circle of 'kindred' has developed in the Garhwal. The local Nepalis would like to confine their kin and affinal ties to the local population and do not prefer to marry in Nepal. The Gorkhali in Garhwal have over a period of time, created a marriage circle and a 'kindred of cooperation' (Mayer, 1960) locally. Most of the genealogies indicated that there is a preferential circle of marriage in India itself. None of the families would like to send their daughters to Nepal and few would even like to get their daughters-in-laws from there. An implicit cognitive barrier has come up between the Nepali in India and their

counterparts in their native country.

There were several old people in the village who had no relatives living with them. One old man lived all alone because his wife was dead and his only daughter married and living elsewhere. When I asked him as to why he did not go back to his family in Nepal, he replied that over many years, all his ties had been cut off. "They will not even recognize me. In the last so many decades, so many of my relatives would have died, so many would have been born. I do not exist for them any more. Earlier, when I was young, I would visit my brothers but slowly I stopped going and they also lost interest. Now I will stay and die here itself". When I asked him as to whether he regretted having settled here, he replied that things were fine for him here and he had many of his kin settled near about.

As a final gesture of resettlement, many of the Gurkhali families have transferred their '*kuldevtas*' or lineage gods to this region. This is a complicated process involving much exertion and expenditure. But once executed this involves a complete break of that family from its ancestral land. The '*kul-devta*' is inherited in the patrilineage and is kept in the house of the eldest son. The other sons contribute to and participate in its worship. This is the most central form of Gurkhali religious life and for them the '*kuldevta*' is a living, emotional member of the household. There is active communication with the '*kul-devta*' who always makes his/her demands known. Of late there has been a clamoring of the '*kul-devtas*' to come to India. There is nothing a Nepali fears more than the wrath of their '*kul-devtas*'. They also cannot live without them. So as more and more '*kuldevtas*' are shifting, the break from Nepal is more or less complete.

Everyone agrees that life is better for them here than in Nepal. Even in Garhwalis, when asked about the Gorkhalis, replied that most of them have settled here because the life in their '*pahar*' is tough. As one Garhwali woman put it, "Once a Gorkhali comes here with his family, his wife does not want to go back home. There, she would have to toil in the fields and walk long distances on the hills even to get water. Here, her husband works in the army, or gets a job and she sits at home and collects water from the tap".

Although the high caste ruling elite of Nepal do not regard the outgoing Gorkhalis with favour, branding them as non-patriotic, yet the state of Nepal gets a large revenue from those who enlist in the foreign armies. In fact, after the Indian Independence, a tripartite agreement was signed with Nepal, which allowed both Britain and India, to continue to recruit Gurkhas in their army.

Although the army is the focal point of entry of Nepalis to Garhwal, not all have come that way. Many had come here as poor lecturers, petty traders, blue collar workers etc. And many who were settled in the '*Naya Basti*' area in the village had eked out a living by brewing illicit liquor. These were the really oppressed and poor people, who had fled Nepal, looking for bare subsistence. The '*Naya Basti*' of the village has today acquired an urbanized look because most of these people have made good by putting their sons in the army. They built '*pucca*' houses and improved their standard of living. Since they lacked an agricultural base, they looked more towards education and became further modernized. The preference of the Indian army for the Nepali soldiers, is linked to the myths of their marital ability set afloat by the British. Because of this they get special concessions for recruitment, including height, educational qualification and age.

THE GARHWALI-GORKHALI INTERACTION

The Gorkhalis of this region are closer to their Garhwali neighbours than their Nepali brethren in their native land. The social world of the Gorkhalis includes the high caste Garhwalis and there is a special agreement among both these groups about the general equivalence of their women. Garhwali women marrying into Gorkhali families was quite acceptable to both sides and there were a fair number of such marriages. Initially when the Gorkhalis came as part of the British army, some of them stayed back, many of them married Garhwali girls. The attraction was of forming a bond locally which would give them an operational kin network, sometimes also land and a family. The Garhwalis on the other hand are not so open to marrying Gorkhali girls because

they say that these girls are prone to running away from their husbands. However they hold the Gorkhali girls in good esteem as being smart and intelligent. There is a general opinion in favour of Gorkhali boys as bridegrooms, as they have a greater potential for joining the army. The Garhwali boys are looked down upon because of their laziness and inaptitude for the army. The high status that a 'army son-in-law' is linked to the fact that this is about the best that a man can do in terms of career opportunities in this region. The hills provide little land and water for agriculture, and there is a lack of natural resources leading to an out migration of men to work in the plains. Those who could not get into the army had to be contented with getting work as peons or 'chowkidars' (watchmen). This also explains the high value placed upon education in this region. The town of Dehradun is famous for its schools all over India. Within this village itself there were three schools and yet many of the children were going to 'good' schools in Garhi or even Dehradun.

That Gorkhali boys have a higher position as preferred bridegrooms is also demonstrated by the fact that it is most unacceptable for the parents of a Gorkhali girl, for her to marry a Garhwali boy, even though the Garhwali family may accept the daughter-in-law quite happily. For the Gorkhali parents it is a matter of shame that their daughter should marry 'down'. In one such case the parents refused to acknowledge their daughter, although they live practically next doors. The Gorkhali's reluctance to give their daughters to Garhwalis is also an indication of their superior attitude towards the local Garhwalis. This also indicates the strong patriarchal ideology of both the groups as a woman after marriage is seen as taking on the identity of her husband's group. Thus the Gorkhali's, in their superiority, can take in women from the Garhwalis but will not give their own women to them.

The local superiority of the Gorkhalis is a derivative of their identification with the army. This has given them an economic superiority as well as an enhanced status which is linked to the ideology which attaches both veneration and glamour to the "warrior". The latter is both cultural being an aspect of the

Rajput identity, as well as a consequence of local ecological conditions. To this can be added the apparently more urbane lifestyle acquired from cantonment living. The women are important markers of boundaries between groups and in this case, the Gorkhali women are definitely more educated and mobile than their Garhwali counterparts. All the school teachers in this region are Gorkhalis and this has also affected the local language, which is increasingly becoming Gorkhali, as all the children learn to speak this language from their teachers in school. The *Aanganwadi* or creche for small children in the village is also run by a Gorkhali girl and the small children learn to speak Gorkhali almost as a matter of course.

There is no doubt that Gorkhalis have established a socio-political dominance in this area. They even justify their dominance ideologically by referring to the past when Nepal had conquered this region. They also do not fail to remark that it was the British army and not the local Garhwalis who were instrumental in pushing back the Nepali aggressors. Their overall image is thus shaped by their army tradition and mythological aptitude for urbanization than of acculturation. The belief in the Lama, as a magico religious functionary is also common to both the communities although the Gorkhalis have more faith in him.

Within the village there is a temple devoted to the god Shiva, looked after by a Nepali priestess, but which is hardly visited by anyone. The only time people visit the temple is to take magical cures from the priestess. The Gorkhalis lack of interest in the Shiva temple is interesting as the Nepalis in Nepal are strong Shaivaites. This further lends credence to the fact that the Nepalis in this region are not a part of the high caste Hindu Nepalis but belong to the tribal Tibeto-Burman stock and therefore are more inclined to believe in the folk deity *Santala Mata* than the sanskritized Hindu god Shiva.

It is thus clear that in evolving a Hindu identity, the Gorkhalis are basically oriented to their roots in their tribal past, and which does not concur with Hindu Nepali traditions. The outward projection of a Hindu identity is done with the help of the local little traditions

of Hinduism rather than with the Brahmanical Hinduism of upper castes. This explains their belief in *Santala Mata*, and the various magico-religious traditions of faith healing and supernatural beings. It also explains their lack of concern for purity and pollution concepts so essential to the core of the Hindu belief systems.

There is only one family of Nepali Brahmins in the village who preside over various rituals, such as the increasingly popular *Sat-Narayan Kathas* which are held to mark life cycle rituals like marriage and birth. But in case of any serious problems the Gorkhalis still prefer to go to the Lamas, who are their medicine men. The only Brahmin family has their house far away from the main village settlement on the top of an incline so as to be as far away physically as possible from the others. They also maintain a disdainful social fighting and is being used for a positive advantage in the present political scenario, having the background of the Indian democratic system.

The local power is in the hands of the Gorkhalis. The head of the local level Panchayat is a Gorkhali lady. She however keeps to the background while her brother-in-law plays the role of the political big-wig. The Garhwalis accept the Gorkhali dominance, but rather reluctantly. The simmering hostility between the two communities is often materialized in the form of drunken brawls. Also both have derogatory stereotypes constructed of each other in which primarily, the Garhwalis are viewed as lazy and good for nothing and the Gorkhalis are viewed as unscrupulous and aggressive.

However although the Garhwalis have accepted some aspect of the Gorkhali culture, especially the language, the major changes are seen in the Gorkhalis themselves. It is they who have moulded themselves in the local culture especially the local religion. In the latter aspect they have taken on the local Garhwali deities and belief systems although their belief in their *kuldevtas* remain unshaken. The latter belief system is prevalent in the entire mountainous ranges, including the sub-Himalayan ranges and Tibet as also Nepal. The most important local deity is *Santala Mata*, a goddess who sits atop a hill. Both the Gorkha-

lis and the Garhwalis have unshakable faith in this divinity and blood sacrifices are offered at her shrine ostensibly not to her, but to a image of the goddess Kali, which is kept outside the main temple. The goddess *Santala* is a vegetarian. Blood sacrifice is again a tradition both in Garhwal and in Nepal. There is considerable cultural similarity between the two communities being part of the larger cultural zone of the *Pahar*. Thus it was not difficult for the Nepalis to take on the culture of the local people. The major changes, like the changes in dress and proper names, are more a consequence of distance from every one else in the village. It is quite obvious that they are not convinced about the Hinduized identity of the local Gorkhalis but cater to them because of economic considerations.

At a *Satya-Narain-Katha* held in the house of a Gorkhali family, the presiding Brahmin priest was disgusted by the family dog which kept wandering into the ritual arena. At the end of the function, he remarked quite sarcastically to me, that "For the Hindus, the dog is a impure being. No real Hindu would tolerate a dog straying into their place of worship. But look at these Gorkhalis, they hug their dogs to their bosom and let them eat out of their plates, they have no sense of purity and pollution. "It is true that the Gorkhalis have an inordinate love of dogs. Every family had at least two to three pets, Quite a few of them being expensive and pedigreed.

THE EMERGENT GORKHALI IDENTITY

To sum up, we can understand the Gorkhali identity as an outcome of several factors.

1. The myth of Gorkha, martial identity created by the British.
2. The high esteem in which members of the army are held in these parts of India. And also the association with the warrior caste of Kshatriya.
3. The distance, both physical and social from Nepal where their tribal identities are left behind.
4. Their exploited status and poverty in their native land.
5. The opportunities, both political and eco-

nomic, provided by India with its democratic setup and better resource base.

6. Loyalty to the army ethos and capacity to adapt to any environment.
7. The lack of Nationalism and patriotic identification with any country.

The last point needs a little elaboration. The indigenous tribal people of Nepal were kin based groups who owed allegiance to their village chiefs and conceptualized boundaries by the idiom of kinship. For these people, loyalty meant loyalty to the village or local chief or to army commanders. Their concept of allegiance is personalized, it is always to a person they can see or identify. The fierce loyalty of the Gorkha soldier to their army commander is legendary. However they do not understand loyalty as it is understood in relation to a state. Abstract concepts of patriotism is incomprehensible to people used to small group identities. Their experience in their native state also has not been positive, the high caste Hindus having entered their territories on the pretext of friendliness and later established a hierarchical rule, relegating the indigenous populations to the bottom rung. Defeated and marginalized in their own country these people had sought refuge in a country which offered them better prospects and most importantly, better social status. Their identity is not to a region but to a kin group and to their lineage gods, the *kuldevtas*. They identify with any place where their kin and their gods reside. It is tied to the place they have created as their settlement. The ideology of identification is on a situational and locational basis. This may be partly derived from a primordial nomadic lifestyle. We may refer here to Black-Michaud (1986: 23) who says, writing about the pastoral Lurs, "Lur identity is clearly tied to the princely dynasties—For a tribe to be recognized as such it was necessary for its members to owe allegiance to a single princely dynasty—" further when the Lurs settle down, they create an identity which may be in relation to the geographical area where they settle.

Thus the tribals create their identity in relation to the place which gives them shelter, they owe their loyalty to those who give them their bread. Theirs is a philosophy of exist-

ence, which is simple and directly associated with their survival and reproduction. The Gorkhalis in Garhwal feel at home and identify with this area completely because some of the Gorkhali families were the first to clear the jungles and set up village here. This is exactly what they had done in Nepal, where as immigrants from China, Tibet and Burma, they had cleared forests to set up villages. Thus in their own cosmology they belong as much here as they had belonged to Nepal. They have thus also found a name for themselves which ties them to their new political head, namely the Indian state which they also view as primarily Hindu, being placed in a predominantly Hindu region.

The identity of the Gorkhali also enables them to identify a niche within the Indian Democracy, by dissociating completely from the state of Nepal. We can call it a 'soft' ethnic identity (Yinger, 1997: 3) but one exerted with a rational choice with a definite goal of political power in sight. Thus the Gorkhali want to create a place for themselves within the Indian Democracy with a new found identity which they are going to exploit to the maximum advantage.

KEY WORDS Ethnicity. Identity. Garhwal. Nepal. Gorkha.

ABSTRACT The Nepali population around the Dehradun district of Uttar Pradesh is in the process of evolving a new ethnic identity, namely "Gorkhali", to establish themselves as a distinct political identity in the state. This paper explores the process of evolution and the reinterpretation of the term "Gorkha" or "Gorkhali" from its invention by the British and its transformation to an ethnic concept by these people as well as explores the dynamics of political and social relationship between the local Garhwali and the immigrant Nepalis.

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Author's Address: Subhadra Mitra Channa, Reader, Department of Anthropology, University of Delhi,
Delhi 110 007, India.