



INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES AND INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES

(Peer-reviewed, Refereed, Indexed & Open Access Journal)

DOI : 03.2021-11278686

ISSN : 2582-8568

IMPACT FACTOR : 5.71 (SJIF 2021)

THE NEPALI/NEPALESE OF MANIPUR: A BRIEF STUDY ON THE SOURCES OF INCOME FOR LIVELIHOOD IN THEIR EARLY MIGRATION AND SETTLEMENT IN COLONIAL TIME

S Abrar Ahamed

Research Scholar

Department of History,

Manipur University, Imphal (Manipur, India)

Email: abrarahamed2020@gmail.com

DOI No. **03.2021-11278686**

DOI Link :: <https://doi-ds.org/doilink/10.2021-49527669/IRJHIS2110013>

Abstract:

Manipur has been the home of various tribes and communities like Meiteis, Nagas, Kukis, Bamon, Pangal and many other mainland Indian communities. The state of Manipur has experienced a long wave of migration of various tribes and foreigners that settled down since early times and even continued till today. The latest trend of migration into the state is the Nepali/Nepalese communities, the largest among the contemporary migration groups. The Nepali has been brought to Manipur in two ways- by the British and Indo-Myanmar Treaty. They have been settled down along the hill ranges where they are suitable for their livelihood and scattered around the Kanglatongbi-Kangpokpi hill ranges and some parts of the valley. The time frame of the study will be upto 1950. The main focus of the paper is about the sources of income for their livelihood in the beginning of the settlement particularly during the colonial period. This paper is an attempt to rewrite the economic history and need more focus on it. The study material will be based on the available books and some thesis but there is no proper study or record available.

Keywords: *Nepali, Nepalese, economy, income, Livelihood, Migration, Settlement.*

Introduction:

Manipur has been a powerful kingdom from time immemorial and remained an independent kingdom till 1891 when it was annexed by the British. Then after the British left India in 1947, Manipur once again getting independent till 15th October 1949 when it merged into India Union as a Part C State through the controversial Merger Agreement in September 21, 1949. In 1972 Manipur became a full-fledged state of India with separate Governor and a Legislative Assembly of 60 members.

Manipur which is the 21st state of India union is situated on the North easternmost part of India. The total geographical area of the state is 22327 sq. km. of which 20089 are in the hill and the

remaining 2238 in the valley. It is surrounded by Nagaland on the north, Mizoram on the south, Assam on the west and an international boundary with Myanmar on the east.

The population of the state according to census report of 2011 is around 28 lakhs. The capital of the state is Imphal. The state has 33 towns and 2391 inhabited villages. It is divided into hill and valley areas. Presently there are 15 districts- 5 in the valley and 10 in the hills. The valley districts which formed only 10% having 14,11,736 (70%) population and the hill districts which have 90% geographical area settled the remaining population. The population per sq. km. in the valley is 624 which are only 49 in the hill districts. There are 34 different recognized tribes in the state. The valley is mainly settled by the majority Meitei followed by Meitei Pangal (Manipuri Muslim), some tribes and other Indian migrants like Nepalis, Punjabis, Biharis, Telis, Marwaris, etc. The hill is mainly settled by tribes of Naga and Kuki followed by some Nepalese.

Objective:

The objectives of the study are-

- A. To give the detail of the coming and contact of the Nepali with Manipur
- B. To find out how the Nepalese brought by the British in the state
- C. To look after the role of the British officers and Gorkha soldiers in the settlement
- D. To find out the economic activities and pattern for their livelihood in the colonial period

Hypothesis:

The Nepali were the migrants initially brought by the British first in the form of soldiers after the recovery of Northeast India in the aftermath of the 1st Anglo-Burmese war. The movement of Gorkha/Nepali soldiers continued till the end of the British rule in Manipur. Then for the political and economic motives along the personal services of the British Officers, the non-soldiers Nepalis were brought in the state slowly by the beginning of the 20th century and allowed them including the ex-soldiers to settled down along their families by creating the Gorkha Reserved area in Kanglatongbi-Kangpokpi hilly belts and subsequently expand to other areas. So, the British was the major agent that brought and connected the Nepali to the state of Manipur by offering and providing their basic needs and services in the less population region of the state.

Literature Review And Research Methodology:

There is no proper records and documents of the early migrant and settlement of the Nepali in Manipur. So we need to study the colonial writings and orders of the British and post independence Indo-Nepal Treaty and foreign affairs followed by the contemporary writings in the late 20th century from the community itself and scholars like T.B. Subba and A.C. Sinha.

The approach of the study is qualitative research which is based on the historical finding. It will be naturally the ethnography based study specially through the colonial records and documents and Indian government's policies and orders from time to time. Basically, this paper will be dealt based on the sources of both primary and secondary including census and election datas.

Result and Discussion:

In the real sense and according to the available records, the migration and settlement of Nepali in Manipur begin during the colonial rule. After the Anglo-Nepal war of 1814-16 and the subsequent recruitment of Gurkhas in the British Army, they were brought to the eastern sector as soldiers, cooks, servants, milkmen, potters, colliers and graziers by the British for their martial skill and honesty. The real contact with the Nepali in the northeast India begin during the Burmese occupation of Assam and Manipur known as Seven Years Devastationⁱ in the history of Manipur in 1819-1826 A.D. Gambhir Singh, later became king of Manipur, took the help of British to overthrow the Burmese occupation. For this some sort of arrangement were made with the detachment of the 8th Gurkha Rifles/Regiments in the preparation of raising the Manipuri Levy around 1824.ⁱⁱ

In the subsequent established Political Agency in Manipur in 1835 with Lt. Gordon as the first Political Agent and his successors, they also brought Gorkhas as their servants, cooks, milkmen and baggage to Manipur.ⁱⁱⁱ The British had given military help to the Manipur during the trouble of tribal raids and rebellions from 1850s to 1880s in the form of punitive measures where there was a large number of Gurkha soldiers included.^{iv} Apart from soldiers, some coolies and labours believed to enter Manipur and took part in the construction and repair of the Imphal-Mao road as there was a lack of manpower after the Burmese run over the kingdom during Maharaja Chandrakirti reign.^v Accordingly, their first settlement as a Nepali village was noticed at Koirengai, 9 km away north of Imphal, sometimes in 1885.^{vi}

During the Anglo-Manipur War of 1891, the British had brought the 42nd, 43rd and 44th Gurkha Rifle to Manipur to conquer it and the Manipur was defeated.^{vii} One Niranjan Singh Chhetry, an ex-British soldiers and later became the friend and bodyguard of Bir Tikendrajit was hanged by the British inside the palace in 1891 for waging war against the British.^{viii} He is believed to be one of the Gorkha settlers around Imphal.

The Gurkha soldiers had a close relation with the already settled Gurkhas around Imphal and even acquired lands some of them. This process of settlement continued and after retirement, the Gurkha soldiers established their settlements around Imphal at Chingmeirong, Mantripukhri, New Checkon, Pangei, Kanglatombi and Kangpokpi taking up the cattle rearing and grazing as their activities and later shifted to cultivation after clearing the forest areas.^{ix} One Captain Tintai Lama, was one of them such settlement and one of the first settlers at Koirengai area and later shifted to Chingmeirong and even some of his descendant still believed to be settled there.^x The place such as

Maram, a predominantly Naga inhabited area in Senapati district, have the Nepali population since 1894. A poet named, Tulachand Ale wrote a book of poem called Manipurko Sawai from there.^{xi} His book was among the first printed books in the history of Manipur literature. In Manipur, the soldiers of 44th Gurkha Rifle, viz, Subedar Gopal Singh Chhetri, Subedar Ran Singh Chhetri, Major Jit Bahadur Limbu, and Durlabh Singh Chhetri were settled in Colatombi, Koirengai, Mantri Pokhari, Pange Change, etc, by the British.^{xii} The settled Gurkhas started to take up cattle rearing and agricultural farming at Kanglatongbi-Kangpokpi areas. Some records for the period 1905-1910 speak about Gurkha settlement neighbouring Sekmai supporting Gorkhali settlement around it at the very beginning of the 20th century.

In 1912, 4th Assam Rifle Division was transferred from Dibrugarh to Imphal where 85% of them were believed to be Gurkha soldiers and some of them even settled down in Manipur after their retirement through kinship and marriage ties.^{xiii} The then government observed the nomadic nature of the Nepali settlers who were in search of a suitable habitat for herding or agriculture. So to keep them in a compact area, the government created the reserve herding known as Kanglatongbi-Kangpokpi Gorkha Reserve Area with an area of 140 sq. miles during 1919-1920. The Tehsil map of 1920-21 was clearly shown.^{xiv} In 1920 there was a political agent ordered of certain restriction on the establishment of Goths (cowsheds) in the Irang areas where they began their settlement around the same time.^{xv} From the British administration reports, there was an evidence of collecting of foreigner tax and cattle or grazing tax as revenue sources from the Nepali settlers. The Nepali graziers were substantial in number among the tax payers.

When 40 panchayats were granted in the state by the then government of Manipur, the Nepalis too were granted one.^{xvi} The Nepalis had contributed through supply of manpower and money during the construction of Imphal-Tamenglong road via Kangpokpi. The settlement of as many as 19 Gurkha families at Maram was permitted by the political agent and state Durbar on 1st May, 1933.^{xvii} Various orders from time to time were issued from the office of the President, MSD as regards the grazing and establishment of goths in Gorkhali settlement.

The settlement of Nepalese was supported by employing few Nepalis in Manipur state Police as chowkidar in inspection bungalows and other public places as early as 1901-1905. Some of the early settlers such as Dhurba Singh Chhetri and Jit Bahadur Limbu were appointed as Mauzadars exclusively for the settlement of disputes among Nepalis and for the collection of taxes from them as early as 1920 by the political agents who were the sole authority over the hill administration of Manipur.^{xviii}

A quiet number of Nepalis came to Manipur as a retinue when Maharaja Bodhachandra Singh married a Nepali princess, Iswari Devi in June 1941^{xix} and continued till 1946 when the strict check was imposed through the establishment of police Thana at Mao and Khuzama, for the restriction of

outsiders entry into Manipur. Some of them believed to be settled down around Kanglatongbi and even supplied milk products to the palace as well as the British authority. Again the Gurkhas who joined the INA from Northeast India were Mohan Singh Chhetri and Suman Thapa from Manipur.....^{xx} There were huge Nepali soldiers fighting on the British side during the battlefield of 2nd world war in Manipur. Again the British brought a large number of Nepalis as coolies and servants during the war and the post war for reconstruction work especially for the Imphal-Mao road.

With the passage of time, the Nepalis had taken up cultivation for their livelihood with the permission of the political agent in 1945. In the next year, K.K.G.R area was abolished and shifted to Irang area as there was an extensive development of cultivation and accordingly, the Nepali settlers were allowed to stay back if they want to cultivate in the area with provided not more than 4 acres of land each.^{xxi} For this the then Settlement Officer, Manipur, P.C. Deb ordered for the distribution of land in Kanglatongbi and Kangpokpi areas among the Nepalis at the instance of MSD.^{xxii} Further, Shree Jagya Nidhi Nepal was nominated/ appointed as the member for the Mao-West District Council on 29th march, 1947 representing the Nepali community. The community was made the domicile community on 7-9-47 and foreigner tax levied on them @Rs 5 per adult was abolished in august 1947 retaining the grazing tax of animals@Rs1/4 per year for each buffalo and @Rs 12 for each of herd.^{xxiii}

Sources Of Income For Livelihood For Nepalis Settlement In Manipur During Colonial Rule:

- 1. Soldiers:** The first one reached Manipur was the Nepali soldiers recruited by the British due the economic pull away from Nepal as the main factor. They were lured by the British in exchange with the income for livelihood in India specially the martial race and poor people. They were paid by the British for their services and later even allowed to settled down around the army cantonment area after retired with their families in areas like Kanglatongbi, Chingmeirong, Mantripukhri, etc and some of them even acquired lands and took up even cattle rearing and cultivation.^{xxiv} Some of them were also working in the palace specially after the coming of Queen Ishori Devi.
- 2. Apart from soldiers,** along with them some Nepalis also were coming as the servants, cooks, Gardeners, milkmen, baggage/animal tenders, coolie and labours, etc.^{xxv} worked and to work as lower jobs under the British authority for their livelihood. Later some reached higher jobs like Chaukidar in police, headmen and Mauzadar in revenue collection.^{xxvi}
- 3. Cattle-rearing and Dairy:** The cattle rearing is the best suitable for the Nepalis settled down in Manipur since there is a large areas of hilly belts for their grazing available and wastelands. Initially the retired soldiers had taken up the cattle rearing and also buffaloes as their economy but after the World War II, it became the main activity of the Nepalis. There were many orders from then Political Agents in providing the grazing lands like Kanglatongbi-Kangpokpi Gorkha Reserve in

1919 which further led to large scale cattle farming and there were around 200 cowsheds.^{xxvii} The British Administration Reports also provided the supports in collecting taxes from animals and grazing. Some of the other places for the grazing areas were Irang valley, Taphau and Maram. There was even restriction from the British officials in having the number of cattles and buffaloes. Later the milks and dairy farming were practiced and even supplies to the British authorities and loyal family.

4. Land and its cultivation of Crops: Initially the Nepalis had cleared the huge jungles for cultivation of crops both the Rabi and Kharif crops specially that didn't need water. The hilly areas were suitable for it with climatic condition and soil with that of the Nepal hilly region. The crops were maize, charcoal, mustard oil, potatoes, etc and they sold them to higher income group, British official and even in royal palaces and markets. Till then there was no wet cultivation of rice until order from 1945-46 through the Political Agent since there was the possibility of cultivate it and then abolished the Kanglatongbi-Kangpokpi Reserve from grazing cattle and allowed to settle only there where they preferred to cultivate it. Even the British provided them pattas for their permanent set up of settlement.

5. Shopkeepers and traders: There was also witnessed of coming and settled down as shopkeepers and traders following the footsteps of Gurkha soldiers. When the office of Political Agent was set up in 1835, the 1st Agent, Gordon was accompanied by the Gorkha soldiers. These Gorkha soldiers in turn were also accompanied by many common Gorkha families as cook, milkman, traders and agriculturists.^{xxviii} Besides many accounts, some of the Gorkha settlement in Maram areas were also included some of the shopkeepers and traders permitted by the British in 1933. The existence of shopkeepers, headman and a government employee in those days settled at Maram indicates that many other Gorkha families were also settled in and around Maram.^{xxix}

Conclusion:

From the above we have seen that the British had introduced the Nepalis in Manipur and provided their services through soldiers, servants, cooks, gardeners, coolie, labours and later some higher jobs both in the British and palace custodian. Apart from government services, they soon started settled down in lieu of their services to the British by taking up cattle rearing and grazing in the hilly and wasteland areas of KKR, Irang valley, Maram and later expanded in course of time to other areas. The British had collected taxes in the form of Foreigner Tax, cattle tax, buffalo tax, land tax by providing pattas to them and set them free to settle anywhere specially around the army cantonment areas which they can recruited in the military if there is lack of soldiers. They can be used both soldiers in time of war and peasant/labour in time of agriculture and peace as acknowledged by the British. Thus, in the colonial period the major sources of income for their livelihood and settlement in Manipur were soldiers, services to British and palace, servants, coolie, labours, cattle rearing, grazing, cultivation of crops and agriculture.

Endnote and Reference:

- ⁱ A dark event in the history of Manipur kingdom during king Marjit
- ⁱⁱ A.C. Sinha and T.B. Subba,
- ⁱⁱⁱ A.C. Sinha and T.B. Subba, op. cit. p.306 and T.B. Subba and A.C. Sinha, op. cit.
- ^{iv} Ibid (first only)
- ^v Ibid
- ^{vi} Ibid p.308
- ^{vii} Administration Report, 1891-92
- ^{viii} Ibid and Manipur State Archive website
- ^{ix} A.C. Sinha and T.B. Subba, op. cit. p.309 and T.B. Subba, A.C. Sinha, G.S. Nepal and D.R. Nepal, Indian Nepalis Issues and perspectives, Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi, p.220
- ^x Hari Krishna Shiwakoti, The Nepali-Community of kanglatongbi: A case study on cultural adaptation in Manipur, unpublished thesis, Manipur University, 2012, p.29
- ^{xi} T.B. Subba and A.C. Sinha, op. cit. p.223
- ^{xii} A.C. Sinha and T.B. Subba, op. cit. p.116
- ^{xiii} Hari Krishna Shiwakoti, op. cit. p.30
- ^{xiv} Ibid
- ^{xv} L.O. Clarke, Political Agent of Manipur ordered on 23-4-1920, Manipur State Archive
- ^{xvi} Hari Krishna Shiwakoti, op. cit. p.31
- ^{xvii} Source Manipur State Archive
- ^{xviii} A.C. Sinha and T.B. Subba, op. cit. p.314
- ^{xix} Administration Report, 1940-41 and Nepram Bihari, Cheitharol Kumbaba, Spectrum Publisher, Guwahati, 2012, p.491 and 494
- ^{xx} A.C. Sinha and T.B. Subba, op. cit. p.110
- ^{xxi} Memo no. 1119-21/XIII-1 dated 26-8-46 (Manipur State Archive)
- ^{xxii} Memo no. 288-D.S. of 2-5-47 (Manipur State Archive)
- ^{xxiii} Manipur Administration Report, 1946-47
- ^{xxiv} A.C. Sinha and T.B. Subba, op.cit. p.309
- ^{xxv} Ibid p. 306 and 309
- ^{xxvi} Ibid p.314
- ^{xxvii} T.B. Subba, A.C. Sinha, G.S and D.R. Nepal, op.cit. p.220
- ^{xxviii} Ghanashyam Acharya, The Gorkhas of Manipur, 1999, p.14
- ^{xxix} Ibid, p.21