



UNDERSTANDING GORKHA MIGRATION AND SETTLEMENT IN ASSAM THROUGH THE DIRECT CAUSAL PROCESS IN THE CONTEXT OF CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

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Abstract: This study has been undertaken to investigate the determinants of Gorkha migration in Assam as a part of *continuity and change* using the direct process. The time frame taken for this study is the period of colonial administration in Assam as this appropriately highlights the phenomenon of migration of Gorkhas as a part of continuity which was indeed given effect by two events, the process of colonialism and the Anglo-Gorkha war of 1816. Here, colonialism and Anglo-Gorkha war has been taken as a thread connected by a chain of dependencies where one event would motivate another event to take place leading to the migration and settlement of Gorkhas in Assam as a part of the direct process of continuity. The example of Tokugawa regime in Japan has also been used to relate with the direct process to understand better.

IndexTerms - Continuity and Change, Direct process, Tokugawa, Meiji, Ichibium, Yandaboo, Segowlee, Kookerie.

I. INTRODUCTION

The assertion that the past significantly influences the present is commonly articulated. Scholars such as Laymen frequently assert that specific behaviours, cultural patterns, or beliefs are the result of the continuation of analogous, previously existing patterns or are influenced by conditions from earlier periods. Historical sociologist Charles Tilly notes that individuals carry the nineteenth century as an incubus, appreciating its significant influence on urban landscapes and daily practices, yet lamenting its hindrance to social thought.

Continuities, however, are frequently met with vigorous denial. A prominent case in scholarly discourse is the debate surrounding the origins of gender and familial relations within the African American community. A rich legacy of African American scholarship, spanning from W.E.B. Du Bois to Franklin Frazier and Kenneth Clarke, has elucidated the unique gender and familial dynamics within the African American community, attributing them in part to a continuity stemming from the historical context of slavery. Nonetheless, following the Moynihan report's encapsulation of perspectives in a policy document during the sixties, there was a pronounced shift in both ideological and academic circles, moving decisively away from the assertion of continuity and towards a repudiation of any such links. In recent times, there has been a notable resurgence in the endorsement of continuity, evident not only in academic discourse but also in legal reasoning and mainstream culture. Consequently, certain legal advocates within the slave reparations movement have grounded their assertions in the enduring socio-economic repercussions stemming from the era of slavery.

Whatever the reality may be, it is important to highlight that none of the several academics engaged in this and related debates over the impact of the past have looked into the underlying premises that support or refute claims of continuity from the past. Many examples from the past and present are often given, although it is not always clear how the present is related to the past.

This paper explores some of the key theoretical issues relating to the problem of continuity and change, arguing whether causal structures underlie such claims or not.

A continuity denotes an object, structural process, or event type that endures across multiple time periods. It involves elements that endure and mechanisms that explain this endurance, which are the primary theoretical concerns to address. All claims of continuity, aside from those entirely fabricated, pertain to the persistence of causal processes, including the persistence of object identity. Social scientists examining the continuity of social processes identify four types of causal mechanisms: identities or self-determining processes, direct processes, hierarchical processes, and post inception or hysteretic processes.

This paper takes Direct process as the causal process to study the phenomenon of Gorkha migration and settlement in Assam as a part of the larger process of continuity.

II. DIRECT PROCESS

It redirects attention from the seemingly enduring identity of objects to the external relationships that connect these objects, along with events, throughout time. In this analysis, we examine causation through a counterfactual lens: *“event C causes event E if and only if there exists a chain of dependencies linking C to E.”* This exploration is undertaken with a keen awareness of the complex theoretical challenges at play, particularly the enduring issues of trumping, pre-emption, and transitivity. Moreover, it is essential to consider that all causal assertions are contingent upon the specific context of the problem at hand and our conceptions of normalcy.

In 1997, Eiko Ikegami conducted a research on the Samurai tradition of honorific individuality in Tokugawa and subsequent Japan. Honorific individualism constituted a fundamental aspect of Samurai Honour culture that developed during the mediaeval era, characterised by a profound sense of warrior pride among men ardently committed to the defence, administration, and enhancement of their ie (house) or landed estate, as well as its standing within the competitive hierarchy of broader society.

The Tokugawa rule dismantled the precarious military basis that first fostered Samurai individuality, but the new leadership astutely maintained the ethical framework and repurposed it to support the objectives of state construction and socio-cultural consolidation. The Samurais were transformed into devoted officials and state workers. During this time, position, authority, and occupancy were objectively and externally shown via elaborate public rituals, sumptuary regulations, and other symbolic instruments sanctioned by the state. The domestication of the warrior class and its ideals inherently created friction, sometimes bordering on chaos, necessitating control, which led to the development of an expansive, self-sustaining identity. The Samurai articulated the concept of mutual resistance within the cultural identity referred to as the *etic of ichibum*, which Ikegami interprets as “an integral aspect of an individual's pride that remains uncompromising.” She further notes:

“The essence of ichibum was evident in many political environments throughout the Tokugawa era. This concept of dignity served as an ethical push for many early modern ideas, irrespective of their behavioural expressions. The culture of honour progressively emerged as a valued moral asset by offering languages for articulating spiritual and social distinctiveness within the Tokugawa Samurai context, when unconditional allegiance and obedience were emphasised even more strongly.”

The Meiji Restoration brought significant changes to the social context of Samurai honorific individualism, notably through the abolition of the Samurai class and the majority of their privileges. Ikegami demonstrates that the legacy of Samurai honour culture persisted and, due to its separation from its original social context, it became a versatile and influential cultural resource for the modern Japanese state. The promotion of secondary traditions of Japanese nationalism, militarism, and imperial expansion was utilised, leading to the development of a unique form of Japanese business organisations and culture characterised by a strong emphasis on loyalty and collective solidarity. The effectiveness of this resource during the modernisation period led to a prevailing belief among both Japanese and Western scholars that the majority of modernisers originated from the Samurai class. Nevertheless, it has faced scrutiny from contemporary revisionist scholars such as Yamamura.

This is an excellent illustration of an identity stream as a self-reinforcing causal process. The interrelation of characteristics that made up the Japanese culture of honour, its spirit of *ichibum*, underwent significant changes from one period to the next, adapting to the changing environment while the environment itself changed in turn to allow for its persistence. This is an example of what quasi-permanence means in cultural terms. The Japanese culture of honour is still very much present in its capitalist system today, and it explains a lot of what makes its most contemporary economic macro cultures unique, prosperous, and troublesome.

Identity endures notwithstanding several causes of change. One source, as previously said, is intrinsic to the essence of culture and its reciprocal relationship with conduct. Modifications are also included in the transmission process.

The East India Company encountered a conflict with the Gorkha state of Nepal. Despite initial setbacks, it ultimately triumphed and finalised the Treaty of *Segowlee* in 1816. Following the confrontation with the Gorkhas, the British began to recognise and value the martial qualities and combative spirit of the Gorkhas from Nepal. The signing of the treaty of *Segowlee* marked the beginning of extensive recruitment efforts by the British for a battalion in India, which was established as the Gorkha Battalion and subsequently referred to as the *“Assam Rifles.”*

Concurrently, subsequent to the Treaty of Yandaboo, which concluded the First Anglo-Burmese War in 1826, Assam was established as a protectorate under British oversight. British imperialism was also expanding its dominion over Assam. The expansive wastelands of Assam and the dense forests presented a significant opportunity for the foreign capitalist entrepreneur. The treaty facilitated the entry of capitalist forces into Assam, marking the years 1826-1873 as a transformative era for the region's pre-capitalist economy as it shifted into a colonial framework.

Capitalising on the Burmese incursion in Assam from 1821 to 1824, the company ventured into the Brahmaputra valley accompanied by a contingent of Gorkha soldiers, enlisted via the Treaty of *Segowlee*. The successful concert of the Gurkhas during the Anglo-Burmese war facilitated the recruitment of Gorkhas across all branches of imperial forces, as well as their establishment in the North-East region. This emerged as a pivotal factor contributing to a notable Nepali presence in North-East India. In the aftermath of the Anglo-Burmese war, the Gorkhas commenced their integration into the Company's forces in Assam, supplanting the Manipuris. Tejimala Gurung elucidates that the significant contribution of the Gorkhas within the Assam Rifles was acknowledged as early as 1865, when the *“Kookerie”* replaced the sword, which had hindered their advancement through the jungles. The *“Kookerie”* became an integral aspect of colonial soldiers in North-East India, and it is comprehensible that colonial administrators acknowledged the significance of the *“Kookerie”* for the soldier stationed in the secluded hills of the Brahmaputra valley. The symbol of *“Kookerie”* was even elevated to the status of an insignia on the caps of soldiers. In 1865, the colonial administration, through the annexation of Bengal Dooars and the signing of the Treaty of Sinchula with Bhutan, acquired significant

geographical territories that were home to a substantial Gorkha population. By the year 1880, the Gorkha soldiers stationed in the valley were primarily drawn from the Darjeeling district located in West Bengal.

The discovery of tea, followed by coal and oil, facilitated new opportunities for capitalist enterprise in Assam. Conversely, extensive lumbering and deforestation necessitated flexible labourers. All these sectors necessitated manual labourers. The British recognised the utility of the Gorkhas for various tasks, including those specifically designated for them. The British regarded them as loyal and law-abiding, albeit quick-tempered. The state facilitated the settlement of Gorkhas in Assam. This was further prompted by the observation that the local population was neither regarded as resilient nor as adaptable as Nepali labourers.

Imdad Hussain notes that one of the early recognised virtues of the Gorkhas was their capacity for colonisation. Following the acknowledgement of martialism's value, the colonial authority commenced the utilisation of Gorkhas in agricultural activities for economic objectives. The report by Captain Francis Jenkins and Lieutenant Robert Pemberton referenced in Imdad Hussain's article. The colonial interest in agricultural land use by the Gorkhas is justifiable. The report states that *"an increase in cultivation and villages is crucial for both the current and future prosperity of this underdeveloped province. It suggests that this could be achieved by allowing wealthy foreign investors to lease land long-term and by encouraging Gorkhas, Manipuris, and others to settle, as the local population is not particularly prolific."*

Imdad Hussain notes that this suggestion was made with intention. Citing the report of FSC dated 15th October 1832, No. 114, by Captain Francis Jenkins and Lieutenant Robert Pemberton, it was with this objective that David Scott had previously authorised Captain Neufville to allocate land at a nominal rate of 8 annas per pura annually to Gorkhas who had accompanied their families. The Gorkhas accepted this offer, and the magistrate who allocated the land subsequently reported that "an extensive village of Gorkhas was established with flourishing 'Dhan' (paddy) in an area that was previously a jungle." During the colonial period, while some Gorkhas participated in tea planting and paddy cultivation, the majority were involved in cattle farming in Assam. Cattle farming involved the production of milk, ghee, and various other products. Their settlement predominantly occurred in grazing reserves located in 'chapor' regions. The forest regions of Kaziranga have also evolved into grazing centres. The proficiency of the Gorkhas in cattle farming and associated production prompted colonial authorities to designate forest areas for Gorkhas as professional grazing reserves, reserve villages, and forest reserves. Burhachapor in Tezpur was designated as a professional grazing reserve in 1881. In 1886, colonial administrators enacted the Assam Land and Revenue Regulation Act, designating Gorkhas or Nepali speakers as a Grazier-Cultivator community.

Hence, just like the unstable military foundation was removed by the Tokugawa regime but it retained the Samuri honorific individualism and used it in its own state creation as an underlying foundation, similarly, the colonial state in Assam retained the martial spirit of the Gorkhas and used them as a colonising tool in state creation which invariably played a significant role in socio-cultural assimilation and consolidation.

Tejimala Gurung observes that by the final quarter of the 19th century, the colonial administration actively promoted the migration of Gorkhas from regions such as Sikkim, Darjeeling, Cooch Behar, and Jalpaiguri in West Bengal, as well as the former Bengal Dooars of Bhutan and the Assam Dooars of Bhutan. This resulted in a significant increase in the Gorkha population within the forested regions. At this juncture, the Gorkha personnel within the colonial military began their retirements and commenced establishing their residences in the adjacent regions surrounding their cantonments. In the final decade of the preceding century, as referenced by Tejimala Gurung in the 1901 census, Assam was home to a population of 20,193 individuals who spoke Nepali. The Gorkha community exhibited a profound commitment to agriculture, with a significant emphasis on cattle rearing, reflecting their deep-rooted connection to this vocation. In 1898, Henry Cotton, the chief commissioner of Assam, observed that numerous retired Gorkha sepoy who established themselves in Assam favoured cattle grazing over agricultural pursuits. According to the Progress report of Forest Administration in the Province of Assam, 1892-1893, Tejimala Gurung notes that in the un-classed forests, the riots were permitted unrestricted access to grazing land without any payment for their plough and domestic cattle. Nevertheless, those Nepalis engaged in cattle rearing for dairy production were subjected to fees for grazing rights, with the Gorkhas from the rest of colonial India being entirely exempt, particularly those who had migrated from Nepal and secured a favourable and profitable market for their dairy products in the various tea gardens of the region. During the period of 1892-93, a total of 13,025 buffaloes and 1,162 cows contributed to grazing fees, which amounted to Rs. 6,772.

The colonial administration began to observe the burgeoning population of cattle within the grazing forest area and contemplated the potential revenue that could be derived from these animals. Particularly when the Nepali-speaking herders began their migration to Assam from Jalpaiguri and its neighbouring regions of West Bengal, prompted by the increase in grazing fees for cattle. The government of Assam introduced a novel regulation for professional graziers, which took effect on July 1, 1917. According to the newly established regulation, an annual fee of Rs 3 has been designated for each buffalo, while a charge of 6 annas applies to other horned cattle. At the moment the regulation was implemented, the population of buffaloes had reached 42,000 in 1915 and 86,325 by 1920.

In addition to their involvement in tea, paddy, and cattle economies, the Gorkhas participated in an industrial economy during the colonial administration, which played a significant role in shaping their settlements in the region. The discovery of the oil field in Digboi led to the employment of a significant number of Gorkhas, as individuals from other communities were reluctant to venture into the dense forests for the necessary de-forestation and excavation work. In 1923, the administration of the refinery discovered a deficiency in the workforce. Jit Bahadur Pradhan was tasked with the recruitment of labourers from regions in West Bengal and Nepal that are predominantly inhabited by Gorkha communities.

III. CONCLUSION

Hence, colonialism here is the event in which British colonial designs in the form of Capitalist enterprise over Assam is prompting the recruitment of Gorkha soldiers from Nepal into the British Indian Army to eliminate the Burmese from the North-Eastern region to lay down the foundations of colonial economy in Assam.

Similarly, the event of Anglo-Gorkha war and the subsequent signing of the Treaty of Segowlee, made the British realize the martial prowess of the Gorkha soldiers which again prompted their recruitment in the British Indian Army.

So, we see colonialism binding together the whole process in a thread of dependencies where the economic designs in the vast wastelands of Assam, the discovery of Tea, oil and coal plays the role of pivotal dependencies. This whole process will further promote the migration and settlement of Gorkhas in the land as the retired Gorkha soldiers will now take up traditional occupations such as cattle grazing and dairy farming. The colonial state will further promote the settlement of the Gorkhas in Assam as labourers in various sites for extraction of resources.

Therefore, it's a cycle of dependencies mainly connected by the two events-colonialism which would provide the intention and motive to set up a capitalist enterprise in Assam resulting in huge benefits for the colonial state; and secondly the Anglo-Gorkha war which provided the British with a handy picture of the Gorkhas, which would ultimately result in their recruitment not only in the British army but also in varied services resulting in the use of the Gorkhas as a tool of colonial manifestations to acquire new territories and create capitalist enterprises.

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