

Modern Myths of Self-Assertion: Reimagination of the Gorkha 'Martial' Legacy by the Nepalis of Manipur

Dolly Limbu*

Introduction

The Nepali settlement in Manipur goes back to 1885¹. The Nepalis entered Manipur and other parts of the North-East India as the protectors of the North-East Frontiers and were later employed in the infrastructural development of the North-East and rest of the country. The demand for Nepalis as coal colliers in Darjeeling, on tea plantations in Assam and for improving roads in Manipur in the face of Japanese onslaught in the Second World War, are few instances of how Nepali labour was commodified by the colonial forces. The formation of Nepal under Prithivi Narayan in the late 18th century subsequently hastened the process of the Hinduisation of Nepal. The complex demographic structure of Nepal comprises mainly of two groups, the *Jati* (Aryan stock, who follow the four fold *varna* system) and *Jana* (tribe of Tibeto-Burman stock, with indigenous practises). The entry of upper caste *Jatis* into the hill areas mainly settled by the *Janas* and the introduction of the concept of purity and pollution by them compelled many to leave Nepal and join the military of the British regime, which was assisted by the Nepalese Durbar. This position of the *jana* in relation to *jatis* even today continues to pitiable in both political and economic sphere². Ecological devastation also to some degree forced the pastoralist and agrarian community in Nepal to move into India. The Nepalis in Manipur contributed extensively via the foreigners and grazing taxes which was imposed on them since early part of 20th century. Subsequently, the British political

*Dolly Limbu, presently teaches at the department of English, D.M. College of Arts, Manipur. Her areas of interests include Popular Culture, Identity and Cinema Studies. Her current research work focuses on understanding the trope of Nepali Identity in an ethnically and culturally divergent state of Manipur.

agents and the Durbar of Manipur legalized Nepali settlements and the establishment of goths (cowsheds). Thus, in July 1947, the existing Gorkha community in Manipur were given domicile status by Manipur State Council making them citizens of Manipur³. The Nepalis in Manipur despite its long history of settlement continue to be gauged as foreign bodies. Their influence in the making of modern Manipur have not been assessed or recognized. The present paper examines the process on how Nepalis in Manipur create modern myths and tales as a systematic tool of self-identification and affirmation. This would be illustrated through the corpus of identity, ethnicity and nationalism.

Posturing the Mythic: The Quint Essential Hero

The term identity has been wide-ranging in its definitions and many a times have proven to be slippery when broken down into categorization. For Steph Lawler 'identity' answers the age-old question of "I am who I am"⁴. An individual seeks to understand itself and the social world in relation to shared history and cultural manifestations. However, the nature and significance of identity vary in terms of time and space. The elusiveness in defining identity in the post-modern era comes from the discursive polemics that embodies the extensive body of identity studies. Identity is not merely a 'sociological filing system' but rather an ongoing process⁵.

Identity has been extrapolated by several rubrics such as kinship, race, gender, psychology, class and sexuality. Subsequently, internalization of such categories produces identities. However, a caveat has been placed in undermining some social categories in the process of identity formation. To Lawler, kinship is significant as it suggests how societies are structured and organized. The non-Westerner society for a long time has understood kinship as the 'building block' of society formation⁶.

Kinship is subsumed as cultural category and has been legitimized to thrust 'Otherness' upon individuals who do not adhere to the codes of the community. Lawler's episteme on kinship, is one of the pivotal markers of identity formation in non-western world, via which we can gauge the concept of cultural rootedness. In its absence, a community faces the threat of identity crises, as experienced by the Nepali population in Manipur. There has been no attempts made to historicize Nepali narratives in relation to Manipur. The Nepalese myths, rituals and folktales spatially and naturally inhibit the space of the Himalayan ranges. The interaction of a community with its space is enclosed by time and expressed through visual and verbal art forms. The lack of history of Nepali kinship in relation to Manipur undermines the identity of the population. The absence of such 'building blocks' acts as a deterrent in understanding a community in a state where cultural and ethnic identity has been built on mythologies both oral and written. Of course, one is not denying that myths evolve with time and its sanctity is affirmed through cultural practices. In the case of the Nepali population in Manipur, their myths and tales which are the cornerstone of one's cultural identity has not found expression and representation outside the community. Here Bakhtin's conception of 'dialogic' is appropriate, where he suggests that words are like ideas that he describes as 'idea-feeling' and 'idea-force'⁷. When these ideas, namely such stories, do not enter in a 'dialogic' relationship with the larger communities, it becomes 'fixed' and 'finalised' which no scope for evolution and further development. Words like ideas according to Bakhtin, wants to be "heard, understood and answered"⁸. Therefore such tales provides visibility and scope for 'dialogical' interaction of an individual community with larger society. This can be attested by school curriculums where few folktales from Meeteis, Tangkhul, Rongmei and several other tribes are envisaged. Such implicit process of acculturation is negated and rendered inaccessible for (settler) communities like that of the Nepalis, thereby fixating it within the cultural confines of Pan Himalayan subtext. The idea/word/tale is denied to enter and interact with other participants. This has been echoed by Stuart Hall, "Identities can function as points of identification and attachment only because of their capacity to exclude, to leave out, to render outside abjected."⁹ In the context of the Nepalis in Manipur or Nepal, the myths and folklores in many ways reflect the indigenous and cultural imprints of the diverse ethnic background. Folklores are pregnant with cultural bearings. To have a standardized tales, which reify one's origin stories for an entire community perhaps is possible in post-modern times. The stories of Niranjana Chhetri's sacrifice in the Anglo-Manipur War (1891) and narrativization of the mythical Victoria Paltan

is the community's response to the creation of modern myths and folklore. It is built with the larger desire for inclusion, acceptance and belonging. To Levi-Strauss, myths play a significant role in culturally and religiously shaping a society. He understands them as:

...human societies merely express, through their mythology, fundamental feelings common to the whole of mankind, such as love, hate, revenge; or that they try to provide some kind of explanations for phenomena which they cannot understand otherwise: astronomical, meteorological, and the like.¹⁰

Myths or folktales of creation and origin give an organizational structure to one's identity. Myths are made up of units, namely that being language. In the case of the Nepalis in Manipur, the units here consists mainly of their martial image and legacy. This has been appropriated via the fabled Victorian unit believed to be formed in 1825 to fight against Burmese invasion in Manipur, through the martyrdom of Niranjana Chhetri and the immortalization of the masculine *Kukhri* dance. Modern Nepali myths in Manipur begin with the Nepali entry into Manipur and compartmentalizing their historic martial contributions as modern tales of self-actualization. As Levi-Strauss concedes:

The open character of history is secured by the innumerable ways according to which mythical cells, or explanatory cells which were originally mythical, can be arranged and rearranged. It shows us that by using the same material, because it is a kind of common inheritance or common patrimony of all groups, of all clans, or of all lineages, one can nevertheless succeed in building up an original account for each of them.¹¹

Myths, despite being fictional in nature, play a pivotal role in modern societies as it hinges on the idea of common ancestry or 'shared consciousness'. And it is specifically this idea of shared and 'common identity'¹² that cements the idea of nationhood. Myths 'explain the world around us'¹³. For the Nepalis in Manipur who are largely treated as an *Auslander* (foreigner in German), myths have 'socio-political functions'¹⁴. Myths act as a sign that signifies their journey and process of legitimate settlement in Manipur. It creates a historical framework of their martial exploits and contribution towards Manipur. The process of myth creation has been broken down into three categories viz, romantic, rational and reactionary. The romantic myth creates tales which hearkens to the supposed golden past, in order to restore 'purity', the rational myth attempts to recuperate human behaviour by inviting 'new way of thinking' and the reactionary approach, on the other hand, derides the past and adopts critical mode of analysis for circulating progressive knowledge. The Nepalis in Manipur, adopts the romantic and rational approach in their process of modern myth

making. These myths have 'heroic pattern' and celebrate masculine constructs of bravery and valour. In the same vein, the Gorkha soldier's exploits in the battles have been codified and have become a 'brave pioneers' of their 'cultural formation'¹⁵. This process of modern making as such, can be understood as:

Created form, transmitted by and effected through familiar communicative forms of a particular era, the cultural formation employs language as symbolic action and incorporates devices, principles and strategies from the domain of poetics, all in the interest of organizing large scale human behaviour.¹⁶

The hero worship of Gorkha bravery, his sacrifice in the First World War and Second World War and the symbolic posturing of his weapon of choice, *Kukhri*, carries equal weight to the Nepali community in Manipur in a same way Achilles and his shield does in the Greek civilization. This mode of modern myth creation is neither new nor surprising as humans have always relied on their 'deepest symbols' to 'recreate realities'.¹⁷ To the Nepalis in Manipur whose settlement have been largely ancestral military settlement, such martial myths that are nestled in Manipur allows them to assure themselves a 'meaningful world'.¹⁸

The Curious Case of the 'Victoria Paltan'

The Gorkha soldiers had significantly aided the Manipuri kingdom in protecting itself from the Burmese invasion in 1824-26 is an established fact. However, the particular Gorkha unit that had assisted the small kingdom has been described and christened as 'Victoria Paltan'. This has been quoted by Archarya Ghanashyam¹⁹ and the writer has cited Jhaljit Singh's *A Short History of Manipur* as its source. Singh, albeit talks about the Manipur Levy sans Victoria Paltan²⁰. The curious case of Victoria Paltan has remained an enigmatic lexicon to the researcher whose pursue in discovering and unravelling the truth behind the unit could not be materialised. Online articles on Nepalis of Manipur continue to refer the unit as Victoria Paltan²¹ without references. It has been casually used without academic engagement. Mackenzie (1979) methodically reviewed Manipur Levy which, was done without discussing the said Gorkha unit²². Huxford (1952) also discussed the Manipur and Burma frontiers in great depth, including the Manipur Levy and role of Gambhir Singh in sustaining it²³. This work also excluded the Victoria Paltan. Thus, it begs the question whether it was a conscious erasure or a genuine mistake. Such writings signal and raise the question on the authenticity of the unit's existence. In fact, Queen Victoria ascended the throne only in 20 June 1837 and Victoria Cross, which is considered the highest honour in the British military

was instituted only in 1857. Thus, the naming of a unit after a monarch or merit is highly questionable when both the ruler and the award recognising military valour came and were inaugurated decades after the supposed unit's formation. This peculiar information whether it was conjured up by accident or the history of its formation is lost with time does reflect to a large degree how discourses on Nepalis in Manipur is a limited domain.

In the absence of written documents, popular hearsays re-ignite the imagination of the community to a certain degree. Is it the trap that some Nepali writers have fallen for as Victorian Paltan as a title demands reverence? Perhaps, the question is too complex to be answered. But if it is the question of honour or valour, the Gorkha soldiers have proven itself not just in Manipur but the rest of the world. Thus this unit remains cloaked in mystery, but it does not take away from the fact the Gorkha soldiers protected the Manipuri kingdom from Burmese invasion and they were further employed to suppress ethnic clashes between the diverse tribes snuggled on the hills. The researcher sees Victoria Paltan as an attempt to mythologize the Gorkha soldiers' entry into Manipur. The community in absence of regional myths and folklore may see this legendary unit as a way of legitimizing one's identity and draws cultural meanings from creation of such modern myths. Indeed an ideal way to narrativize one's place in history. This desire for narrativization of ones stories of bravery goes in line with Calhoun take on nationalism. As implied

The modern claim to nationhood is often evoked through the language of kinship and descent. Leaders rouse followers by calling on their loyalty to their 'brothers', and by describing the threat to the purity of the national bloodline if their sisters have children by foreigners. People speak of their nation as being like a large family, or claim blood ties, or talk of how their ancestors fought their ancient enemies in some long-ago battle²⁴.

Conceivably, the stories of Gorkhas as protectors of Manipur can be seen as an extension of the community's desire to carve a niche identity that is socially rooted in Manipur.

Niranjan Chhetri and the Mythicization of Gorkha Heroism

Everyone in Manipur is familiar with the popular martyrs and heroes of the Anglo-Manipur War of 1891. Figures such as Bir Tikendrajit, Thangal General and Paona Brajabashi and their martyrdom continue to inspire generations. However, Chhetri's sacrifice has not been met with the same zeal or even showered with marginal due that was poured out to other martyrs. His sacrifice is largely obscure, restricted within the ambit

of his community who fondly remember him on his death anniversary, 8 June 1891. He has been described as the first Gorkhali to die to India's freedom.²⁵ Niranjan Chettri was part of the 39th Native Infantry and had left the British to join the Manipuri cause. He was appointed as a Subedar (second rank officer) by the leader of the resistance, prince Tikendrajit. He continues to remain the unsung hero for his community. His tales create a sense of rootedness of the community with the settled land. He is a kindred kin, in toe with Lawler's construct of kinship, who to some degree created a meaningful connection and make semblance of the ruptured Nepali identity in Manipur.²⁶ His martyrdom for the territorial integrity of the state connects the Nepalis with the watershed moment in the Manipuri history. It, thus, lessens the room for othering them and house themselves in Manipur's military history. His heroism and bravery works in tandem with Calhoun's assessment of ethnic affiliation.

Ethnicity is thus not simply an extension of kinship, but the way in which collective identity gets constituted when kinship loyalties, traditions, and other means of passing on common culture confront a broader arena in which most interaction is not organized by the same kinship and culture as within the group.²⁷

In absence of common cultures or stories in a diversified community such as the Nepalis, Chettri's martyrdom is a new way of sustaining and recalibrating Nepali identity, a means of persevering a larger Nepali canon in Manipur.

Zygmunt Bauman suggests that the question of identity is perplexing and cannot easily be contained.²⁸ To some identity can be a matter of self-affirmation and for some it can be something that falls under constant scrutiny and needs to be justified. One has 'to explain, to apologize for, to hide or on contrary made more salient or legible.'²⁹ The Nepali identity does not fall seamlessly in the state given the history of migration and its existence lies in a state of 'negotiation'. Identity matters and is not complicit in nature. As he states:

The idea of 'identity' was born out of crises of belonging and out of the effort it triggered to bridge the gap between the 'ought' and the 'is' and to lift reality to the standards set by idea-to remake the reality in the likeness of the idea.³⁰

Bauman makes it explicitly clear that 'longing for identity' comes from a 'desire for security'.³¹ What nature of security can a legitimate Gorkha or Nepali identity offer these 'translated subjects'? Can it be what Bauman describes as an ability to attain 'the reified view of the social world'.³² The desire to be identified as a Manipuri Nepali steams out from the desire to establish a social order and concord. It is an affirmative step of creating an appropriate arena of 'belonging' to the state.

The Codification of *Kukhri*

The image of 'Gorkhas' as the martial race has captured the imagination of the 'Nepalis/Nepalese' across the world. Naturally, in Manipur as well, this image is hugely popular amongst the community. Many continue to choose the armed services as profession of their choice. This flight of fancy is owed to the history of martial race and the aura attached to the construct of bravery. The martial history of Nepalis is another modern myth that Nepalis continue to sustain and verbalize. The *Kukhri* which became a symbol of 'Nepali' soldier's courage, nonetheless rooted in the history of violence has in the post-colonial times translated its presence in a form of *Kukhri* dance, performed by the Nepali youth in special occasions of *Tihar* and *Dashain*, to name few. Such practices represent to some degree the post-colonial melancholia of the imagined community, rationalising its state of homelessness.³³ In fact, in 1885, the uniform of the Cachar Levy (which later became Assam Rifles) underwent major changes, one of them being the introduction of the crossed *Kukhri* badges³⁴ in order to symbolize the Nepali contribution at the military forefront. This act of the institutional recognition *Kukhri* perpetuated its emblematic importance further.

The *Kukhri* dance is 'central' to 'Gurkha group identity'.³⁵ Historically, the dance appears to have been born in the barracks of the British army. There is speculation that the dance was introduced by Prithivi Narayan Shah in Bharatpur in 1768. Although, many sources consider that the *Kukhri* dance was first performed by the Gorkha soldiers in Serembam in Malaysia where they were posted.³⁶ The dance representatively pays homage to the martial trait of the Gorkha regiments and is a powerful display of their accomplishment. A performance, which was essentially performed by the soldiers and ex-soldiers in military parades and patriotic events, has seeped into public domain with young boys and men performing this cultural vestige. The dance which is accompanied by *Kukhri* exploits music of wide-ranging modulation to highlight the dancers' affinity with the revered weapon. Some scholars believe that the origin of *Kukhri* dance is more dated, with its humble beginning resting at the mountains of Nepal.³⁷ For the hill communities, the dance was part of their recreational activity during festive occasions.

The masculine *Kukhri* dance, performed by the young men, connects the art with the martial history of the community. Their penchant for remembering and articulating it as a live performance especially during communal settings, is a celebration of their martial heritage. Such performance brings together the idea of common and shared heritage. This commonness,

is important, as the military recruitment cuts across different ethnicities and castes. Some lower castes changed titles too in order to get recruited. How does one build or negotiate with an identity which does not overlap or is an extension of national identity? The Nepalis in Manipur offer affirmative answers to us. It is through celebration of martial identity, which cannot be considered as Nepal's heritage alone. The soldiers (who settled in Manipur) and their progeny and the larger community recognize this as an affective moment in their course of settlement in Manipur. A codification of their migration as a modern-day pilgrimage embodies abstract qualities such as valour, courage, loyalty and sacrifices. Myths and folklores also aim at teaching such abstract qualities, moral learning and knowledge of one's past. Nepalis have found an alternative way of translating and transmitting their tales via art form such as dance, an insightful way of answering the 'Who am I?' debate. If one doesn't verbalize, enunciate, practice and internalize it, identity can be erased. It has to be continually manufactured and sustained. "Without its various languages, identity would be deprived of the capacity to enunciate—to speak and to act in the world".³⁸

Modern Myths and Collective Identity

Stuart Hall talks about the importance of creating a collective identity for diasporic communities, as a way of creating inter-linkages and correlation. This sense of collectiveness is created either through mutual or communal practices, homeland, rituals or myths. Thus, it is not surprising when the affirmation of self becomes necessitated by formation and enrichment of modern or recent tales on heroism. In its absence, the community would have no cultural or traditional distinctiveness to fall back on. Therefore, diasporic communities fiercely guard their past in order to venture out and signify their presence.

...our relation to the origin is always something that has to be told; it is why "the past" becomes available to us only insofar as it is something narrated, and it is also why such narration is itself always constructed partly through memory, desire, fantasy, and myth.³⁹

Nepalis in Manipur and India as a whole undergo identity crises at some point in their lives. The pertinent reason being a diasporic subject. Smith suggests that the term 'diaspora' was used for the first time in relation to the displaced Jews in Europe following the aftermath of the Second World War, meaning that "their primary identity connects them to their ancestral country, even if they may have lived their entire lives elsewhere".⁴⁰ For the Nepalis, their inherited national identity is

a constant reminder of 'being' from another nation. This, subsequently, makes them a soft target during communal or indigenous movements. When India's relationship with Nepal is strained, the Nepalis settled in India pay the heavy price. Either they are physically assaulted, displaced or mocked⁴¹. They are reminded of their foreignness. Conceivably, it is easy to understand why diasporic subjects are inscribed and understood as "translated" subjects. Hall locates his understanding via Rushdie's work, as stated"

Diasporic subjects are what Salman Rushdie calls "translated" subjects—having been carried across borders by the act of migration, those who are "translated" make a home for themselves in the interstices of the world. Such subjects must learn to inhabit more than one identity, dwell in more than one culture, and speak more than one language, for as Homi Bhabha suggests, to speak in the unsettling place in between languages means to constantly negotiate and translate across their differences.⁴²

This acknowledgment of being straddled in the state of 'in-betweenness' of being and becoming an Indian or a Manipuri is a life-long process. It is a process of constantly being defensive, having to justify and legitimize one's presence. It is also maintaining the image of being an amiable and non-threatening subject/community garb, if dissent is exercised, it is met with aggression or contained immediately. This 'in-betweenness' is a condition that diasporic community has been internalized as an everyday reality. Bhabha describes it as a space where "minority subject somewhere between the too visible and the not visible enough."⁴³

Nonetheless, the corpus of identity comes with wide-ranging intricacies. The Nepalis in Manipur use their modern myths to create cogency. At times, this same assertion can become a tool for alienation or difference. Because identity is always created in relation to others. The community uses the stories, myths and the historical migration to build an identity amongst themselves and to create an idea of sameness within its own distinctive group of people. However, there is no certainty that it will hold ground with other communities. Will such identification stir up more differences rather than cementing it? As Malesevic contends:

Having an 'identity' meant being on the hand identical (or in less extreme versions, similar) to a group/category and on the other hand it also meant being different from another group/category.⁴⁴

This is the burden that Nepali identity entails to, to live in a crossroad of legitimization and delegitimization. Yet it is important to note that identity and its varied forms will continue to remain 'foundational forms of selfhood'.⁴⁵ Its influence cannot be overlooked and undermined. The

struggles and challenges that pose Nepali identity today, despite its peripheral actuality, it is significant that it continues to be affirmed and asserted.

Every identity has at its 'margin', an excess, something more. The unity, the internal homogeneity, which the term identity treats as foundational is not a natural, but a constructed form of closure, every identity naming as its necessary, even if silenced and unspoken other, that which it 'lacks.'⁴⁶

Nepalis in Manipur and the Question of Ethnic Affirmation

For Calhoun ethnicity takes precedence over any other forms of identification. This holds ground in the case of contemporary Manipuri society as well. The making of political parties, militant outfits or civil movements, all are propelled by ethnic associations and loyalties. The diversity of the Manipuri population makes it all the more important.

The notion of nation commonly involves the claim that some specific ethnic identity should be a 'trump' over all other forms of identity, including those of community, family, class, political preference and alternative ethnic allegiances.⁴⁷

The concept of *Auslander* which in German means 'foreigner' can be applied to the Nepalis in Manipur. Eriksen suggests this term has been used in Germany selectively on the immigrant population. The Scandinavians and the Dutch are considered "less foreign than the Turks and Jews"⁴⁸. It is noteworthy that the European immigrants undergo minimal struggle while trying to fit into the German nationality rubric. However, the Jews and the Turks find it more challenging, as their nationality and race are considered distinctive which adds to their foreignness. The domiciled Nepalis whose cultural practices are closer to the mainland India are considered more foreign than the recent immigrant from Myanmar or Bangladesh. The ethnic and cultural identity continues to remain significant when the larger rubric of national identity is examined. The instances where Nepalis struggle to get passport or domicile certificates issued in Manipur is a clear indication of their *Auslander* condition. Their supposed foreignness is inherently part of their collective identity. Hall talks about how cultural identities have "real, material, and symbolic effects"⁴⁹. This holds ground while evaluating the Nepali identity in Manipur. This can be illustrated by the differential treatment that the Nepalis face in Manipur on the basis of their racial make-up. The Aryan looking ones are open to facing racial discrimination owing to their strong features. It was the case when they were targeted by the insurgents in the valley during the height of the Anti-Foreigner movement,⁵⁰ Meanwhile, the

Mongoloid Nepali stock find easy acceptance and have scant chances of facing discrimination or racial profiling. This does not rule out the institutional discrimination, which they too are subjected to, when their ethnic and 'supposed' national identity is examined minutely.

In fact, the Nepali contribution in the making of modern Manipur has been rendered immaterial and sidelined. Brara suggest that the Nepalis introduced and taught terrace farming and production of milk.⁵¹ The absence of academic work on them highlights their negligible condition. The Nepalis mode of self-governance in villages via Panchayat system has come under duress from the hill tribes. The tribes want to abolish the system and bring it under Autonomous District Councils.⁵² Many Nepalis continue to reside in the hill districts on the basis of land grants provided to them by the State Durbar, worry about their displacement if the Hill Areas Act comes into force. According to this Act, the non-tribals are not permitted to possess land in the hills⁵³. They want the government to safeguard their land rights. These people have settled in Manipur for roughly around a century and have no other homeland. The surrogate homeland of Nepal is a myth for them.

Conclusion

In Manipur, the ethnic identity politics has collaborated itself with the notion of identity politics. In a small state such as Manipur, in the face of the diverse population, ethnic identity has become a site for the 'demographic struggle for power'.⁵⁴ The lack of such debates consolidates the 'Nepali' ethnicity to be standardized. According to Prasenjit Biswas and Chandan Suklabaidya, the usage of 'terms such as 'homeland', 'indigeneity' and 'tribal identity' etc., produce a sense of well-defined 'self' opposed to Others'.⁵⁵ During the Anti-Foreigner movement in 1980, around 2000 Nepalis fled Manipur when local insurgents burnt down several Nepali villages.⁵⁶ The Nepalis' demand of 'special protected status' in Assam perpetuated their status as foreigner and illegal migrants in the late 1970s. This 'manifested' into 'ethnic cleansing' by the *Khasis* in Meghalaya, which triggered the demand for Gorkhaland⁵⁷. The Nepali demand of political rights and autonomy is always met with suspicion. On the other hand the colonial writings have restricted the Gorkha body within the ambit of 'martial race' trope⁵⁸. Such literatures mainly converged on the agility and natural abilities of a Gorkha soldiers, which systematically racialised the Gorkha bodies, the British discourse subsided 'multiple fluidities' of Gorkha identity.⁵⁹ The Nepalis in Manipur evoke 'martial' myths for self-identification is problematic yet at the same time can be seen as a means of establishing a tangible,

indefinite and legitimising self. The Nepali are a diverse community with caste and tribal system and practices, and such modern myths allow them cut across such cultural barriers and to fall back on a quint essential hero and heroism that is secular in nature.

Notes

1. Kanglatombi in Manipur is considered as the earliest place of Nepali settlement.
2. This idea is based on Gerrard Toffin's take on the *Janajati* Movement, by the indigenous communities in Nepal that gained momentum in the 1990's. It aimed at the representation of protecting *Janas'* unique cultures and ethnic identities, propelled by 'anti-Hindu' and 'anti-Brahmanism' ideologue. 'The Janajati/Adivasi Movement in Nepal: Myths and Realities of Indigeneity'. *Sociological Bulletin*, January-April 2009, Vol. 58, No. 1, Special Issue on Development of Democratic Routes in the Himalayan 'Borderlands' (January-April 2009), pp. 25-42.
3. Resolution No. 5 of 9-7-1947, Manipur State Council.
4. Lawler, Steph. *Identity: Sociological Perspectives*. UK: Polity Press. Second Edition, 2014, p. 15.
5. *Ibid*, p. 10.
6. *Ibid*, p. 49.
7. Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. Eighth Printing, 1999, p. 10.
8. *Ibid*, p. 88.
9. Hall, Stuart. 'Introduction: Who needs an Identity?' in *Questions of Cultural Identity*. Eds. Stuart Hall and Paul de Guy. London: Sage, 2003, pp. 1-17, p. 5.
10. Levi-Strauss, Claude. 'The Structural Study of Myth', *The Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 68, No. 270, Myth: A Symposium (Oct.-Dec. 1955), pp. 428-444, p. 428.
11. Levi-Strauss, Claude. *Myth and Meaning*, London: Routledge, 2001, p. 17.
12. MacCormick, Neil. 'Nation and Nationalism'. In *Theorizing Nationalism*. Ed. Ronald Beiner. New York: State University of New York. 1999, pp 189-204, p. 192.
13. Herzberg, Max J. *Myths and their Meaning*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1964, p. 312.
14. Stoeltje, Beverly J. 'Making the Frontier Myth: Folklore Process in a Modern Nation'. *Western Folklore*, Vol. 46, No. 4 (Oct., 1987), pp. 235-253, p. 239.
15. *Ibid*. p. 242.
16. *Ibid*. p. 240.
17. Biallas, Leonard J. *Myths: Gods, Heroes and Saviors*. Connecticut: Twenty-Third Publications, Fourth Printing, 1998, p. 3.
18. *Ibid*. p. 23.
19. Acharya, Ghanshyam. *The Gorkhas of Manipur*. Imphal: Organising Committee, 44th Annual Gorkha Conference of Manipur Gorkha Welfare Union. 1999, p. 14.
20. Singh discusses Gambhir Singh and Manipur Levy in *A Short History of Manipur*. Imphal: OK Store, 1965, pp. 259-260.
21. Phuyal, Sanju. 'The entry of Gorkha in Manipur' http://epao.net/epSubPageExtractor.asp?src=leisure.Essays.The_entry_of_Gorkha_in_Manipur_By_Sanju_Phuyal
- Lisam, Khodom. 'Who are the Indigenous People of Manipur, Part 3' http://epao.net/epPageExtractor.asp?src=features.Who_are_the_Indigenous_People_of_Manipur_Part_3_By_Khomdon_Lisam.html.
22. Mackenzie, Alexander. *The North-East Frontier of India*. Delhi: Mittal Publications. 1979, pp. 150-151.
23. Huxford. H.J. *History of the 8th Gurkha Rifles 1824-1949*. Aldershot: Gale and Polden Limited. 1952.
24. Calhoun, Craig J. *Nationalism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. 1997, p. 37.
25. Subedar Niranjan Chhetri. *Darjeeling Chronicle*. <https://thedarjeelingchronicle.com/subedar-niranjan-chhetri-1st-gorkhali-freedom-fighter-to-die-for-india/>
26. To acknowledge his sacrifice a statue was unveiled by the Chief Minister of Manipur in March 2021, at Kanglatombi, which a Nepali dominant region. <https://www.aninews.in/videos/national/manipur-cm-unveils-statue-gorkha-slain-soldier-niranjan-chhetri/>
27. Calhoun, p. 40.
28. Bauman, Zygmunt. *Identity*. UK: Polity Press. 2004.
29. Bauman, p. 13.
30. *Ibid*, p. 20.
31. *Ibid*, p. 29.
32. Malesevic, Sinisa. *Identity as Ideology: Understanding Ethnicity and Nationalism*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. 2006, p. 20.
33. *Tihar* in its literal translation means festivity. It is equivalent to Indian festival of Diwali, festival of light. *Dashain* is one of the most popular and important festival and cultural event for the Nepalis. The ten-day festival celebrates the victory of good over evil.
34. Muktan, K.K. 2003, 'Gorkhas Contribution to External and Internal Security of India' in *The Nepalis in Northeast India*. Eds. A.C. Sinha and T.B. Subba, New Delhi: Indus. 2003, pp 124- 147, p. 127.
35. Lotter, Stefanie. 'Clogging up Storage Space or Representing Culture? Collecting Nepali Khukuri in the U.K.' in *Weapons, Culture and the Anthropology Museum*. Eds. Tom Crowley and Andy Mills. U.K: Cambridge Scholars Publishing. 2018, pp 84-98, p. 94.
36. Lotter, p. 94.
37. Shrestha, Bimala. *Social Life in Nepal*. Delhi: Vani Prakashan. 1997, p. 81.
38. Hall, Stuart. *The Fateful Triangle: Race, Ethnicity, Nation*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. 2017, p. 128.
39. Hall, p. 130, 2017
40. Smith, D. Anthony. *National Identity*. London: Penguin Books. 1991, p. 186.
41. A Nepali speaking man was beaten up and tonsured in Varanasi in July 2020, because of the remark made by Nepalese Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli that (Lord) Ram was born in Nepal. <https://scroll.in/latest/967796/uttar-pradesh-hindutva-group-in-varanasi-tonsures-nepali-man-forces-him-to-chant-jai-shri-ram>

42. Hall, p. 173, 2017.
43. Bhabha, Homi K. 'Culture's In-Between' in *Questions of Cultural Identity*. Eds. Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay. London: Sage Publications. 2003, pp. 53- 60, p. 56.
44. Malesevic, p. 15.
45. Ibid, p. 20.
46. Hall, Stuart. 'Introduction: Who needs an identity?' in *Questions of Cultural Identity*. Eds. Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay. London: Sage Publications. 2003, pp. 1-17, p. 5.
47. Calhoun, p. 36.
48. Eriksen, Thomas Hylland. *Ethnicity and Nationalism*. New York: Pluto Press. Third Edition. 2010, p. 137.
49. Hall, p. 128, 2017.
50. Brara, Vijaylaxmi, 'Nepalis of Manipur from the perspective of 'cultural collective'' in *Nepali Diaspora in a Globalised Era*. Eds. A.C. Sinha and T.B. Subba. New York: Routledge. 2016. pp. 221-229, p. 226.
51. Ibid, p. 221.
52. Ibid, p. 224.
53. Ibid, p. 223.
54. Shimray, U. A. 'Ethnicity and Socio-Political Assertion: The Manipur Experience'. *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 36, No. 39 (Sep. 29 - Oct. 5, 2001), pp. 3674-3677, p. 3674.
55. Biswas, Prasenjit and Chandan Suklabaidya. *Ethnic Life Worlds in North-East India: An Analysis*. New Delhi: Sage Publications. 2007, p. 257.
56. Samaddar, Ranabir. *The Materiality of Politics: The Technologies of Rule. Vol I.*: New Delhi: Anthem Press. 2007, p. 234.
57. Das, Kishor Nava. 'Identity Politics and Social Exclusion in India's Northeast. A Critique of Nation-Building and Redistributive Justice'. *Anthropos*, Bd. 104, H. 2. 2009, pp. 549-558, p. 554.
58. Martial race theory was a pseudo-scientific theory, which became popular in the mid nineteenth century that asserted that some races were biologically superior to others. On this basis, the Pathan, the Rajputs, the Sikhs and the Gorkhas (Nepalis) were considered fittest for the recruitment in the British Indian army.
59. Golay, Bidhan. 'Rethinking Gorkha Identity: Outside the Imperium of Discourse, Hegemony and History' in *Indian Nepalis: Issues and Perspectives*. Eds. T.B Subba et al., 2009. pp. 73-94, p. 79.