

# Understanding Gorkha Migration and Settlement in Assam Through the Post Inception or Hysteretic 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 the debate of continuity and change using the Post inception or Hysteretic causal process. Through this process an attempt has been made to understand that the migration and settlement of the Gorkhas in Assam in ancient, medieval, and colonial period as a whole is a part of the process of continuity but the factors determining their migration and settlement from the ancient to the colonial period forms a part of the process of change. The study reveals how the event of Gorkha migration and settlement remains constant but the factors determining that event has kept on changing over the course of history.

**Keywords:** Pragjyotishpur, Kamrupa, Yogini Tantra, Lalmohar, Koch.

## 1. Introduction

The assertion that the past significantly shapes the present is commonly encountered. Academics such as Laymen often presume or declare that a particular behaviour, cultural pattern, or belief is a continuation of a similar, earlier pattern, or a result of conditions that prevailed in a previous era. Historical sociologist Charles Tilly notes that individuals carry the weight of the nineteenth century like an incubus, a continuity he appreciates for its prominent influence on our urban environment and daily practices, yet finds regrettable for the way it hinders our social reasoning.

Events are central to all conceptions of causality and, therefore, to any explicit or implicit concept of continuity. For philosophers like Quine, all things are ultimately seen as formed only by occurrences. Orlando Patterson posits that events are often deemed socio-historically significant just when they are monumental and recognized or manufactured as such by agents. He characterizes this limitation as a defect, since crucial events are often trivial and may be entirely overlooked when they happen. According to him, a comprehensive sociological explanation of events must include the notion that all occurrences may have significance.

A crucial distinction must be established from the outset. When asserting that an event causes an outcome, we may refer to the event as a complete entity or, as emphasized by Hart and Honore, to "the fact that an event was of a certain type or possessed a certain feature casually relevant to the outcome." The distinction between token (or singular) and type (or property) causation has gained significance among scholars of causality, with ongoing debate regarding which is more fundamental. Judea Pearl

posits that the critical inquiry is centred on the tangible assertions made by type and token statements regarding our world, as well as the organization of causal knowledge to fulfil these assertions. Positivists focus on causally relevant attributes of events, whereas cultural and case-oriented sociologists consider the entire concrete event as the causal antecedent.

It is intriguing that events, not social objects, are the focus of one significant effort to theorize continuity in the social sciences. In his work, economist Alexander Gerschenkron discusses a troubling subjectivism rather than the types of cultural and structural continuities that have been covered above. According to him, "continuity must always and everywhere be viewed as a tool created by the historian rather than something inherent and always present in the historical matter." He differentiates between five ways we use the word continuity, focusing on the issues of continuity and discontinuity in economic transformation. It could simply mean growth or directionality, like the evolution of institutions and ideas; it could mean periodic recurrence over time, like cycles and stages, where the causal mechanism is constant from one stage to the next; it could mean endogeneity, which mostly comes from the way the scholar approaches his material; or it could mean length of causal regress, which means continuity as a long causal chain.

He is most intrigued by the fifth meaning, which pertains to continuity as the stability of the rate of change in aspects like price and national income, emphasizing the constancy of a low rate of change. Discontinuity signifies a rise in the rate of change from earlier low levels. While Gerschenkron presents some valuable insights, this perspective on continuity is overly limited, even within the realm of economic events. Continuities in events are observed not only in steady rates but also in the variance profiles of consistent recurrences. For instance, each year brings a variation of seasons; however, the unwavering regularity of their change aligns closely with our understanding of continuity, making it peculiar that Gerschenkron would seek to exclude these from our definition of continuity.

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 any item, structural process, or event type that endures throughout two or more temporal periods. It involves elements that endure and processes that explain this endurance, which are the primary theoretical concerns to address. All assertions of continuity, excepting those that are entirely fabricated, pertain to the persistence of causal processes, including the persistence of object identity. Social scientists focused on 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 Post inception or Hysteretic 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 and the factors determining this migration as part of the process of change.

## **2. Post inception or Hysteretic process**

This process encompasses several sub-classes of causal processes, all of which have a same developmental trajectory. An event or object is produced in time T1 by causal elements exclusive to that period. During the subsequent time T2, the event or item endures, but this is attributable to a distinct collection of causal elements specific to T2, and this pattern continues into T3. Consequently, between T1 and T3, there exists an unbroken continuity of the item or event in issue, yet there is no discernible continuity in the array of variables that precipitate it.

Unpredictability and irreversibility are the two characteristics of post-inception causal lines that are considered to be the most crucial factors. Since following causes seem to originate either accidentally or by some mechanism of casual attraction by the impacted item that is still not fully understood, nothing in the first or preceding cause on the nodes of the chain can properly anticipate later causes.

Kenny and Zellner identify path-dependent processes as the most recognized subclass. Another is the causal blowback in which the expectation of a development, such as an economic downturn, precipitates its occurrence. Another discovered subcategory of this class of casual lines is self-interested regeneration. Individuals who get advantages from a particular complex will create strategies to sustain it, even after it has beyond its utility or the initial conditions that justified its formation. Orlando Patterson identifies 'organizational inertia' as a quintessential example of this phenomenon.

For example, when examining the migration or presence of Gorkhas in Assam during ancient times, we frequently consult ancient texts like the Yogini Tantra and various other historical documents that illustrate the relationship of the current North-Eastern region of India as an extension of Pragjyotishpur, thereby affirming the historical ties between Gorkhas and Assam. Historian Kanaklal Baruah observes, "It appears that Pragjyotisha, in ancient times, encompassed the present-day district of Purnea in Bihar and extended to the North-West as far as Koshi." It indicates that Pragjyotishpur had integrated the Koshi river, which is located in present-day Nepal. The realm stretched to the river in West Bengal and encompassed regions of Nepal and Bhutan prior to the conceptualization of contemporary political borders.

Prafulla Medhi notes that in the 6th century, a significant portion of what is now eastern Nepal was incorporated into the Kamarupa Kingdom, resulting in the descendants of the Gorkhas remaining subjects of Kamarupa. The inhabitants of the Kamarupa Kingdom ventured into its interior regions, establishing a permanent presence while embracing the local language, culture, and social customs. Om Prakash Basnet posits that Narakasura is an ancestor of the contemporary Gorkha lineage, suggesting a historical connection between the Gorkhas and present-day Assam.

In the Nidhanpur Inscription of King Bhaskar Varman, Professor S.M. Ali states that Bhuti and Mahabhuti Varman allocated land to 205 Brahmanas along the Koshika, currently recognized as the river Koshi. Kanaklal Baruah states that the Kamarupa Kingdom extended to the northern bank of the Koshi River, encompassing the area of present-day Nepal, following the Mauryan dynasty and preceding the Gupta period. The Morang, currently known as Barahtirtha, was the birthplace of Narakasura. The historical narratives indicate that the ancient kingdom of Pragjyotishpur encompassed the ancestral homes of the Gorkha, characterized by a uniformly extended territorial administration and favourable mobility of its populace in the past.

Historians Shyam Raj Jaisi and Purrushottam Bhandari examine the historical narratives indicating that the history of Assam is linked to the greater Kamarupa Kingdom. Their analysis highlights the significant relationship between the Gorkhas and the region as integral components of this ancient kingdom. Yogini Tantra delineates Kamarupa as follows: "Extending from the Kancana mountain in Nepal to the confluence of the Brahmaputra, from Karatoya to Dikkarasini, the northern boundary at the mouth of Kanya, with Kratoya to the west and Diksu to the east." Purushottam Bhandari indicates that there existed matrimonial and familial relationships between the Kamarupa and Nepali Kingdoms. Harsha Varma Deva, the monarch of Kamarupa, arranged the marriage of his daughter Rajyamati to Jayadeva, the ruler of Nepal. A different perspective on this history suggests that numerous relationships, aside from royal ones, existed between the families and individuals of the Gorkha

community and other regional groups. Shyam Raj Jaishi states that a tradition remains prevalent in Nepal. Machindranatha and Minanatha were distinct individuals, although both resided in Kamrupa at different times. A prolonged drought in Nepal resulted in famine. The king of the country was directed in a dream to invite Machindranatha, who was located in Kamrupa at the time. Following the directive of the dream, the king of Nepal extended an invitation to Machindranatha to visit Nepal. The drought has concluded. In Nepal, Machindranath is regarded as a saint by both Shaktas and Buddhists.

Om Prakash Basnet states that the kingdom of Kamarupa encompassed a significant portion of Nepal's territory, leading Narakasura to bring Brahmin families from that region to serve as priests in the Kamakhya temple. The consolidation of Nepal resulted in those regions coming under its administration, necessitating that Brahmins obtain permission from the king of Nepal to serve as priests at the Kamakhya temple. They obtained official approval marked with a red stamp and were subsequently referred to as "Lalmohar" Pandas. Sukalal Panda was among the initial Lalmohar pandas. Lopita Nath asserts that the initial pandas at the Kamakhya temple were priests from Nepal. They referred to themselves as "Lal Mohari Pujari." Tika Bhattarai notes that certain rulers of ancient and medieval Assam facilitated the permanent settlement of various priestly families by granting them revenue-free land during their reigns. The family of Bhaskar Acharya was designated to serve as priests at the Kamakhya Temple. They were referred to as Lalmohar pandas. Certain families continue to be recognized as Nepali Pandas. A significant number have relinquished their language and assimilated into the local Assamese culture and society.

In the pursuit of understanding Gorkha migration during the medieval era, the region delineating the Koch kingdom and Bhutan emerges as a significant focal point. During the significant period of partition and transformation within the Koch kingdom, Bhutan's consolidation commenced under the astute leadership of Shabdrung Nawang Namgyel. In accordance with the predetermined fate, Namgyel swiftly asserted his dominance over western Bhutan, a region that was then a mere collection of various minor kingdoms governed by Dharma Raja or Deva Rajas. He embarked on a policy of expansion, consolidated the nation under a theocratic framework, and ultimately ascended to the position of supreme leader of the state. In the year 1624 A.D., he embarked on the establishment of a diplomatic friendship treaty with the monarch of the Gorkha state, seeking the cooperation of King Ram Shah to send forth a number of families from his realm to inhabit the territories of the Gorkha kingdom. Ram Shah addressed the request by dispatching multiple Gorkha families, led by Bishnu Thapa, to safeguard and enhance the Bhutanese territory. A segment of the population was poised to establish themselves in the southern region of the state to address a deficiency in manpower, as the dominant community consistently favoured residing in the elevated terrains rather than the warmer southern areas adjacent to the Koch Kingdom.

Similarly, in 1640, when Shiva Singha Mall of Kathmandu was the ruler, people were recruited to work in the Dzongs and monasteries of Bhutan. Bhutan with the help of settled Gorkha population maintained its southern plain tracts dividing it into several units called Dooars.

The East India Company engaged in conflict with the Gorkha state of Nepal. Despite early failure, it ultimately triumphed and finalized the Treaty of Segowlee in 1816. However, after the conflict with the Gorkhas, the British began to recognize the martial nature and combative disposition of the Gorkhas from Nepal. Following the ratification of the Treaty of Segowlee, the British initiated extensive recruiting of Gorkhas for a battalion in India, which subsequently became known as the Gorkha Battalion and eventually the "Assam Rifles."

Simultaneously, after the Treaty of Yandaboo, which concluded the First Anglo-Burmese War in 1826, Assam was established as a British protectorate. British imperialism was also expanding its dominion over Assam. The wide wastelands of Assam and dense woods provided a significant potential for foreign capitalist entrepreneurs. The pact facilitated capitalist exploitation in Assam, marking the period from 1826 to 1873 as a shift from a pre-capitalist economy to a colonial era.

Capitalizing on the Burmese invasion in Assam from 1821 to 1824, the company strategically walked into the Brahmaputra valley accompanied by a contingent of Gorkha soldiers, who had been recruited under 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 and their establishment in the North-East region. This emerged as a crucial factor contributing to a notable Nepali presence in North-East India. After the Anglo-Burmese war, the Gorkhas started to take the place of the Manipuris in the Company's forces in Assam. Tejimala Gurung outlines the significant recognition of the Gorkhas' contributions to the Assam Rifles dating back to 1865, when the "Kookerie" replaced the sword, which had hindered their advancement through the jungles. The "Kookerie" became an integral component for colonial soldiers in North-East India, and it is logical that colonial administrators acknowledged the significance of the "Kookerie" for the soldier stationed in the isolated hills of the Brahmaputra valley. The symbol of "Kookerie" was formally established as an insignia on the caps worn by soldiers. In 1865, the colonial administration acquired significant geographical areas through the annexation of Bengal Dooars and the signing of the Treaty of Sinchula with Bhutan, which included a substantial Gorkha population. In 1880, the composition of Gorkha soldiers in the valley was primarily from the Darjeeling district of West Bengal.

The discovery of tea, followed by coal and oil, unveiled fresh opportunities for capitalist ventures in Assam. Conversely, extensive lumbering operations and the clearing of forests necessitated compliant workers. All these sectors necessitated the involvement of manual labourers. The British recognized the utility of the Gorkhas for a variety of tasks, both miscellaneous and specifically designated. The British regarded them as steadfast and compliant with the law, albeit with a propensity for quick temper. There existed a form of governmental support for the establishment of Gorkhas in Assam. This was additionally influenced by the observation that the local populace did not exhibit the same resilience or adaptability as the Nepali labourers.

### 3. Conclusion

So, from the above instances, it can be concluded that as an event, the Nepali migration took place in different phases, but the factors in each period did not remain constant. In the ancient times it was miniature in nature and more in the form of individual relations like familial and matrimonial relations between the royal houses and pilgrimages contributed as a factor.

During 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, it remained a territorial contestation for the Dooars between the Koch kingdom, Nepali Kingdom and the Bhutanese Kingdom. So, it was much more of territorial acquisition in nature and transfer of people.

During the colonial period as seen in the research study above, the migration of Gorkhas was more in the form of a manifested design of the British colonial regime especially in the North-Eastern part of India to give a thrust to the capitalist enterprising tendencies of the colonial state.

Hence, we can draw an outcome in which we can put the event of migration within the theoretical context that is-an event or object generated in period X by casual factors that are peculiar to period X. In



the adjoining period, Y, the same event, or object persist, but now it is due to an entirely different set of causal factors that are peculiar to period Y and so on it continues till period Z. Thus, between period X and Z, there has been an uninterrupted continuity of the object or event in question, yet no apparent continuity in the set of factors causing it.

So, both continuity and change here goes hand in hand. The event signifies continuity which remains the same that is migration and settlement of Gorkhas in Assam in different periods, however the factors determining the same event signifies change as it takes different patterns in different periods compelling the same event to take place in a repeating manner.

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